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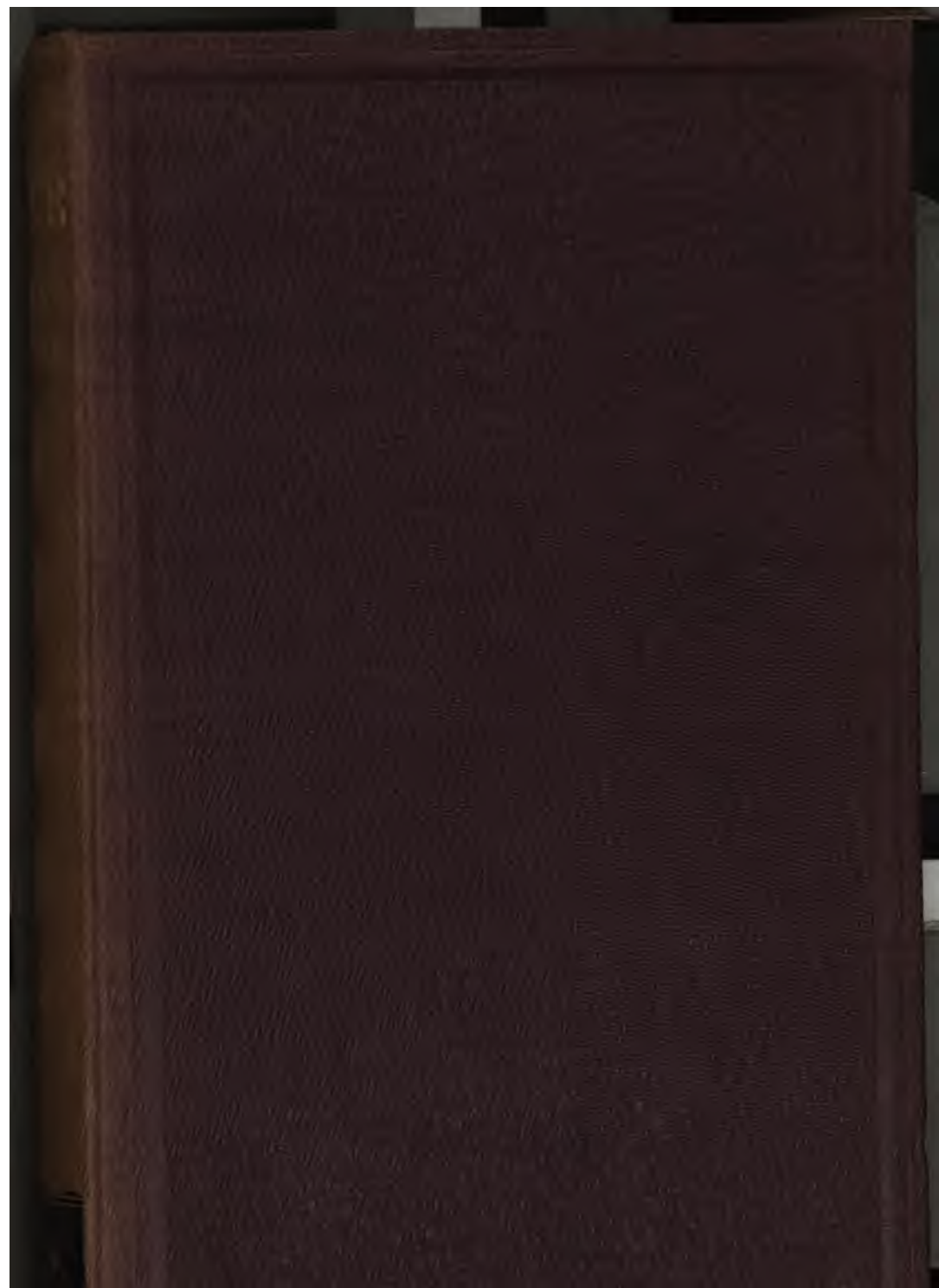
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A D È L E.

A TAL È.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

"NATHALIE," "RACHEL GRAY,"

&c. &c.

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways.

A maid, whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."—WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO THE READER.

THERE is no reason why the Author of this work should trouble the public with a preface explanatory of a very simple tale; but she feels bound, in self-justice, to state, that, for motives on which she need not enter here, she has taken liberties with the topography of the Département de l'Ain, as well as with the names of various localities mentioned in the following pages.

A D È L E.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILL.

THE funeral was over. The sun shone on the red mould of a new grave in the little and silent churchyard; and Osborne Lodge, casting by its ten days' gloom, resumed the aspect and the stir of life.

William Osborne sat in his father's study. He had arrived that morning, unwarned, uncalled-for, and his dead father met him on the threshold. The shock was great; a dull, silent grief followed it—the grief of a son who was obliged to look back, far into the past, for the time when he received parental affection, and returned filial love.

He sat, as we said, in his father's study; and he looked at his father's portrait. Time had not yet touched that room. Sunshine, a glimpse of breezy foliage, a clear blue sky, a sound of singing birds, came in through the open window. It might have been just opened by Mr. Osborne, for he liked sun

heat; and that fresh, dewy landscape cheered him; his leather armchair, writing table, desk, and worn-out pen, were still there. He might have gone out for a moment to return in another moment, and resume his interrupted labours; the place seemed ever waiting the absent master, by whose image, full length and lifelike, it was still guarded.

A sunbeam lit that portrait, remarkable as a painting, more remarkable as a representation; will, energy, life, breathed from that silent canvas, and seemed to defy death and the grave. A gentleman of stately presence had been the late William Osborne,—with noble and handsome features, with fine, though severe dark eyes, with a manly, though haughty bearing,—and with folded arms and with a long, sad gaze, his elder son looked at that stern countenance, in which he seemed to read the story of his whole past life. Into that past we will not enter; it was full of bitterness and woe;—let it sleep. Every thing, and every one, in the life of that dead man, had been sacrificed to commercial ambition; but this tale deals not with him; let him rest with his faults and his virtues—*requiescat in pace*.

“Was that the end?” sorrowfully thought William Osborne, turning away—“was that the end?” And turning, as we said, he found himself face to face with his stepmother, whom he had not seen for eight years. She had entered the room unheard, and stood by his side before he was conscious of her presence.

Wrath, bitterness, had marked their last meeting, for she had helped to estrange the father from his

son, and to alienate the son's duty from his father. They exchanged a long, searching look,—and did not speak. He found her what he had left her—a calm, handsome, fair woman, with quiet blue eyes, and a smooth look. She saw in him, scarcely altered by time, the same man who had ever baffled her silently; whom she had had the power to injure, but whom she had never been able to deceive or to charm.

William Osborne was thirty—pale, tall like his father, and remarkably handsome. He had the broad and noble brow, the full dark eye, the curled and raven hair, the handsome features, the free and open bearing of manly beauty, and with them a pure and intellectual cast of countenance, a look benignant, though penetrating, a smile sweet in its irony, that made it impossible to see his face once and forget it.

Mrs. Osborne held out her hand—and a handsome white hand it was. He silently took and pressed it, but without cordiality. He could forgive; he could neither forget, nor feign to forget. She sank down on a chair, and sighed.

“William,” she said, in a soft, bland voice, “I am glad you are come before the reading of the will. Remember, that whatever the contents of that will may be, I know nothing of them.”

“And I care nothing for them,” said he, with a darkening brow. “My child is rich; my income is sufficient for the wants of a single man.”

“You may marry again,” she interrupted.

He smiled, with some bitterness, for he was a

widower, and his married life had been full of misery ; but he merely said,—

“ I may, certainly ; but I am rich enough even for that. My father, besides, was estranged from me in life ; I do not expect him to have remembered me in death. He has, I have no doubt, left the business to Robert, portions to my sisters, and a handsome income to you. Let it be ; it is well.”

“ He was, indeed, a most kind and affectionate husband,” began Mrs. Osborne, raising her handkerchief to her eyes.

The eulogy was interrupted. The door opened ; and the son and the two daughters of Mrs. Osborne, and a few decorous male friends in black, entered the apartment. The will was going to be read.

Mr. Osborne left his stepmother’s side, and walking away to the farthest window, he stood there apart, like a spectator, who looks on calmly and dispassionately, whilst the drama, in which he has no share, is being acted.

Robert, a sullen, good-looking youth of twenty-two, fair, like his mother, sat down and looked what he already felt himself—master of the place. Isabella, a fair, handsome, free-looking girl of seventeen, in whose features grief did not exclude an expression of imperious impatience, too habitual to be easily checked, went and stood by the chair of her mother, who was sobbing bitterly. Anna, the elder daughter, a pale, fretful girl, sat down on a couch, where she moaned impatiently, and smelling her vinaigrette, shut her eyes and murmured to herself, but without caring to be heard,—

"Oh! dear, what a noise they do make,—and my head aches so!"

"Do not talk to me, Isabella," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, in a voice broken by tears, "do not. I tell you to listen to that voice from the grave."

"I thought you knew nothing about the will?" shortly said Isabella.

Mrs. Osborne withdrew her handkerchief.

"No; but I knew him—his goodness, his generosity—and to receive new proofs of both, for on both I am dependent, and he will not have forgotten it—overpowers me."

She spoke low; but Anna was not far away, and opening her eyes, she answered her mamma rather sharply.

"But why should Pa have been so very generous to you, Ma? You have your own fortune, you know."

An angry flush rose to Mrs. Osborne's brow.

"If you call a hundred and seventy pounds a year a fortune," she began.

"Oh, dear!" impatiently interrupted Isabella, "I daresay we need not trouble ourselves about it,—that it all goes to the business."

Here Robert frowned, and turning round, wondered they could not be silent. The room was large, and the sound, not the substance, of their discourse, had reached his ear. Mrs. Osborne again raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Isabella sat down, and in the midst of a decorous silence, the will was read.

William Osborne had always been a man of few

words. His will was brief to laconism. He burdened it with no useless legacies to wife, children, friends, and dependants. He left all—house, plate, furniture, business, and money, to his elder son, William Osborne; and to the said William Osborne he solemnly bequeathed the task of providing for his father's widow, and her three children.

Robert looked blank, and stared incredulously. Isabella indignantly drew up her fine figure; Anna bit her lip and shut her eyes; Mrs. Osborne sank back in her chair, and fainted outright; and William Osborne, who had not left the window, but sat there by a table apart—his elbows leaning upon it, his cheek, colourless as marble, resting on his hand—cast his fine dark eyes around the room, and smiled a sad and melancholy smile.

It was evening.

Again William Osborne sat alone in his father's study. A lamp burned by him; around him papers were scattered. His brow was overcast with care; he gnawed his pale lip with mingled perplexity and trouble. Once he rose; he went to the window and looked out. The night was clear; the lights of London burned on the horizon—a faint revelation of Babylon. But Mr. Osborne saw nothing;—thought, tormenting and anxious, stood by his side, and claimed his ear.

The late Mr. Osborne had been held a rich man. He had married twice ; and his first wife, an heiress, had left her only child, his elder son, a handsome fortune. His second wife had brought him the means of wealth, and trebled his prosperity. Yet, strange to say, Mr. Osborne had died worth very little ; he had left vast property and vast debts ; and the only legacy about which there was no illusion, the only bequest of substance he had made to his son William, was his family.

Of Robert, of his sisters Isabella and Anna, Mr. Osborne knew very little. They were children when he was estranged from his father ; he had not seen them since then ; he had not corresponded with them ; they were, in all save blood, strangers to him. Mrs. Osborne he knew better ; we may add, he knew her but too well. She was a close, a subtle schemer, a disappointed politician, an ambitious woman, whom ambition had ever deluded. Her first husband, M. Joseph, a French manufacturer, had been fond of her ; he had given her his entire confidence—unfolded all his plans to her. For two years Madame Joseph had been admired as a beauty and a wit in a narrow circle, in a province of France. She had been popular, and deservedly so, if persevering efforts are a title to popularity. Voltarianism was rife in the little world she wished to rule ; and Madame Joseph had been a Voltairienne of the first water. Monsieur Joseph was a violent Bonapartist, and every one around him shared the disease ; but no one could equal Madame Joseph ; the bust of the Emperor adorned her boudoir, spite all

the Bourbons might have to say. Waterloo was not to be mentioned to her without insult; and she never could forgive England, Saint Helena, never.

Monsieur Joseph died, and left his widow one child, a boy, and a hundred and seventy pounds a year. All was over in France. A military uncle took the boy, who was now a captain in the French army; and Madame Joseph returned to her native land, and looked out for a second husband. We need not say, that in decorous, church-going, loyal England, glorying in Waterloo, Voltarianism and Napoleonism were dropped. Mr. Osborne offered himself, and was accepted. Scandalous people said the lady made the offer; and every one agreed that on either side the marriage was a bargain. Mr. Osborne was a Catholic, and of an old Catholic family, too; and his wife, not knowing much of him, thought at first, that as she had managed Monsieur Joseph through Voltaire, she now might manage Mr. Osborne through the Church. Her first attempt quickly undeceived her. She thought that William, her husband's son, was eminently fitted for the priesthood; he was so handsome, so pious, so amiable, so good.

"My son a priest!" cried Mr. Osborne, in great wrath, "never, madam, with my consent, never!"

A sharp explanation followed. Mr. Osborne wanted his son to be like himself, a man of business. As to religion, he had none—he cared for none. Mrs. Osborne might go to church, or to meeting, for

all he minded. But one thing he would request of her, never to meddle in his affairs.

And to his dying day he kept her ignorant; to his dying day he gave her the coldest share in his liking—the most niggardly portion in his esteem and confidence. Mrs. Osborne bore with what she could not help: she dropped her Catholic tendencies, and became High Church. The portrait of the Prince Regent replaced the bust of Napoleon. As to Voltaire, Mrs. Osborne had heard of him, indeed, but she hoped he was not so wicked, so dreadful as people thought. Her own convictions were, she thanked heaven, too firm to be unsettled easily; and though she had the misfortune not to agree with her dear William on some important points, yet there was one consolation—he had left her her children.

Yet, spite all this, the world gave Mrs. Osborne but a cold share in its graces. High-Church ladies were shy of her. She was pious, charitable, correct, yet she convinced no one. In vain she laid herself out, in vain she lived in style; so far her husband gratified her. People danced at her balls, and ate her dinners, and did not care for her.

There was a feeling abroad, not that Mrs. Osborne was not sincere, not that she was a time-server, who bent to every idol and every worship, but that she had no real, substantial power. Her husband did not care for her; her stepson had braved her openly; her children made no account of her; and the world saw this, and valued Mrs. Osborne accordingly.

But no one knew better, and valued Mrs. Osborne

less, than her stepson. Indeed, he valued her too little, or he despised her too much ; and because she had never deceived him, he concluded, unwisely, that she was not a dangerous enemy and a more dangerous friend. She had no share in the anxious and wearisome thoughts which now absorbed him.

He had sat down again ; suddenly, without knock or warning, the door opened, and Robert and his two sisters entered. They came laden with a declaration of war. At a glance Mr. Osborne saw it, and he could not help smiling. He wheeled his chair round, and faced the three.

Isabella stepped haughtily forward.—“ I oppose the will,” she said, dogmatically. “ I give you fair warning, William—I oppose it.”

“ There never was such a cruel, selfish affair,” fretfully began Anna ; “ I shall certainly not allow myself to be despoiled in that way.”

Robert was not remarkable for eloquence ; all he could find to say was the observation, doggedly uttered, of

“ It won’t stand, you know—can’t.”

Their elder brother gave them a compassionate look.

“ Poor young simpletons !” he said, with more irony than wrath, “ have you for the last five years been living in this style, with a mansion in town and a lodge in the country ?—with carriages and horses—hounds, too, I believe—with foreign tours, and home splendours ?—with a locust-like array of servants, retainers, and friends ? and have you really thought

that it would last? I am amazed at your folly, and still more at your blindness!"

Severe was his tone as he concluded. A dim revelation of ruin floated before the three allies, but they would not give in.

"I tell you I oppose the will!" said Isabella, strongly.

"Very well!" was the calm reply.

"I shall not submit," said Anna, "on no account."

"Very well!"

"It can't stand, and it sha'n't!" growled Robert.

"Very well!" persisted their phlegmatic brother.

His coolness, his amused, and yet pitying smile, his absence of wrath, disconcerted them. They exchanged alarmed looks. What more they would have said, we cannot record. Again the door opened: this time it was their mother who entered. She gave them a severe, suspicious glance, but said, with grave gentleness—

"Robert, Isabella, Anna, my dear, I wish to speak to your brother William alone."

They obeyed ungraciously, though well pleased in reality to obey.

There was a pause after their departure. Mrs. Osborne sat down in a deep chair facing her stepson's, and said, softly—

"William, I hope the children have not annoyed you?"

"Oh, no," he calmly answered; "they are sore because they do not know the truth, and think

themselves harshly used. They will do me, or, rather, their father—for what have I to do in this?—ample justice yet.”

His stepmother looked more disturbed than surprised. She gave him a searching, anxious look, which he met with great composure. She was agitated, for one habitually so calm, but he was silent; he made no offer to meet her half way. Compelled to speak, she said, at length—

“William, what do you mean?”

“I mean,” he composedly replied, “that this large inheritance which I have this day received, is left to me in trust; by no means for my personal use or enjoyment. Surely I need not inform you that it makes me none the richer than I was yesterday.”

Mrs. Osborne seemed to wish to pass lightly over this.

“Yes, yes, I understand,” she said quickly; “your father was too just, too upright—he gave you great power—but it was for the good of his children and their mother. And what have you decided on?”

“On nothing as yet,” he slowly replied; “perhaps you are not aware, ma’am,” he added, fixing his dark eye on his stepmother, “that my father’s affairs were and are in a most embarrassed state.”

“Indeed!”

“Ay, indeed! But do not misunderstand me; dishonour cannot reach my father’s name. He spent and speculated to rashness; from disgrace he ever remained free.”

She raised her hand to her forehead.

"Is it ruin?" she asked.

"Very nearly so," he calmly replied.

"What do you mean to do?"

"There is nothing to do, but to go on and be ruined outright."

Mrs. Osborne gnawed her pale lip, and looked fixedly before her.

"But in the meanwhile—" she suggested.

"Oh! in the meanwhile, the only thing is to sell off, pay all debts, and, so far as is possible, provide for you and your children."

Mrs. Osborne looked alarmed, and tried to smile.

"Matters cannot be so bad," she said, "your father hoped, or he would not have left the business to you."

"It was because my father did not hope, that he did leave all to me," said Mr. Osborne; "he knew that he could trust my honour; he knew that nature never meant me to be a man of business."

"No—no; he thought highly of your talents," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, with some eagerness; "besides, you were his elder son. It was just."

Mr. Osborne did not look convinced, and said very coldly:

"Excuse me, madam, but how could my father reckon on my doing after his death that which I had refused to do during his lifetime?"

Mrs. Osborne's handkerchief was ever that lady's most useful auxiliary. She raised it to her eyes, and said from behind it:

"Ah! William, a voice from the grave."

William frowned and looked bored, but did not answer.

"And there is still hope," pursued Mrs. Osborne, returning to the practical; "all cannot be over in England, and the connection in France is still splendid. You remember Courcelles?"

"I have not forgotten it," he replied with some emphasis; and his dark eyes met hers with grave sternness.

"Ah! there is much to be done there," she said, "much by one who knows the place and the people. My first husband was a Frenchman, as you know, and I shared his confidence and helped his views, and there is much to be done in Courcelles."

She paused, waiting for a reply; but Mr. Osborne preserved the listening attitude of one who receives information and has none to communicate. Mrs. Osborne coughed, and resumed with a sigh:

"For my own part, I care not what becomes of me: France, a desert, any place would be an acceptable home if, as I fear, Osborne Lodge must be relinquished."

"There is no doubt about that," observed Mr. Osborne; "Osborne Lodge, all its appurtenances, must be sold; the debts."

"Yes, yes," she interrupted, wincing, "my feeling quite. Honour before all, I said so from the first; but as I said, any place, any home you appoint will do for me—for the dear girls, who are both the most unselfish, the most devoted of daughters."

Mr. Osborne smiled.

“My sisters shall be thought of first,” he said, “and in an hour I shall be able to give you a final answer.”

“We are all in your hands,” she said, with a constrained sigh. She rose; he walked with her to the door, closed it upon her and came back; and for an hour he paced that room, haunted by the Past, hating the Future.

Mr. Osborne had suffered and got over his sufferings. In a careless, dreamy way, he was happy and enjoyed life. What, though the path to happiness was closed, that path which to youth’s seeming stretches to the very horizon, and which to man’s knowledge is but a few steps and ends in the barrenness of the desert; yet there is more in a man’s life than domestic bliss or a woman’s love. His intellect remained to him; his love of art, his delight in beautiful places and lovely things, and, with these and the means of wandering—for his tastes were simple, and required no more—many pleasures. But take away Liberty, and what was left to the sad and disappointed man?

With a sense of wrong and injury, Mr. Osborne looked up at his father’s portrait. “I resisted him in life,” he thought, bitterly, “and dear did it cost me. I obey him in death—I trust in God that it may not cost me dearer yet.”

But his resolve was taken; he went down to the drawing-room, where his stepmother and her three children were sitting, sullen and silent: they knew all, and felt conquered. Mr. Osborne took a few turns in the room, then he came back to the table,

around which his relatives were seated, and he said calmly—

“I am going to France in a week. I shall explain to Robert what he can do here in my absence. If you are willing to reside in Courcelles with my sisters, I shall be happy to see you there.”

The last words were addressed to Mrs. Osborne.

“As you please, as you like,” she said, graciously.

“That horrid lake and those horrid mountains will kill me,” moaned Anna.

“I hope not,” said Mr. Osborne, smiling.

“I don’t care where I go,” observed Isabella, tossing her haughty, handsome head; “I know I was too proud, too independent to be a favourite with Mr. Osborne. He has left me a beggar, but I don’t care.”

“I suppose you will leave me your instructions,” sneered Robert.

“Of course,” briefly replied his elder brother.

“Oh, what a noise they do make,” murmured Anna; “and they know I have a head-ache—so selfish.”

Mrs. Osborne’s lip curled, and her blue eyes had a touch of scorn. “Who knows but I can lead him yet?” murmured ambition in her ear. “Who knows?”

William Osborne looked at his stepmother, whom he disliked; at his brother, whom he despised; at his sisters, whom he did not love, and he bowed his head before inexorable duty, and thought sadly: “The soldier must not shrink from the battle-day, the captain must not desert the sinking ship.”

He saw the conflict, the storm, and their fatal end, and he saw no more. The hours of heavenly repose, the blessings unknown and unwished for, the unsuspected torments and trials that lay behind both in the bosom of the future year, were all alike hidden from his gaze in the Almighty and all-merciful Hand.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE WORLD WAS GOING AWAY IN THE
MANOR OF COURCELLES.

"THE world is going away," said Mademoiselle de Janson, "the world is going away."

Her melancholy look sought the high ceiling, then wandered over the oak-panelled walls of the old Hall, with its deep windows, until it finally came back to the stone chimney, high and deep, the smouldering wood fire, and the diminutive figure of her little goddaughter Adèle, sitting on a low stool, with her hands clasped around her knees, and the light of the dying flame playing on her wistful young face.

"Where is the world going to, Cousine?" she asked, looking up.

"There it is," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson, sitting up erect in her chair, "the very child asks where to, and who shall venture to answer the momentous question?"

She sank back with a sigh, and shut her eyes.

"Where can the world be going to?" thought Adèle, very much puzzled; "I wish she would tell me." She looked up at her godmother, and her thoughts took another turn.

"How pretty she must have been," she thought; "~~how~~ pretty she is still,—more than pretty, beautiful; better than beautiful, lovely."

"Open the window, child," murmured Mademoiselle de Janson, "it is quite close."

"Of course it is with a fire," thought Adèle, but she did as she was told.

"My head aches!" moaned Mademoiselle de Janson, feebly.

"Are you sure it is your head, Cousine?" doubtfully asked Adèle.

"Well," confidentially replied Mademoiselle de Janson, "I am not; strange I should not know, is it not?"

"Very," replied Adèle, still looking admiringly at her cousin.

Mademoiselle de Janson had been a fair beauty, with golden hair, blue eyes, and an angelic face, and lovely she was still, at we will not say what age. She might be mad, as some said, or only whimsical, as the more indulgent averred; she certainly was peculiar, capricious to the tip of her fingers, perverse in her ways, neither amiable nor kind, but she was lovely, and ever would be. Caprices, folly, faults without number, could not make her lose the gift; she was original, too, independent, and cared for nothing, and no one. Her favourite sentiment,

“that the world was going away,” gives a fair clue to her position and her character. A beauty must regret the past; a nobly-born and impoverished lady cannot look with favour on a new order of things. To be sure, revolutions had nothing to do with the late Monsieur de Janson’s passion for gambling; a passion that had left his daughter merely what the law would not allow him to touch—her mother’s fortune, namely, the old manor in which she resided, and which she could not afford to keep in repair; a neglected garden and orchard, a few acres of indifferent land, and an object which, though a perfect eyesore to her aristocratic gaze, was, nevertheless, the chief source of her income, a forge let on an endless lease to an English capitalist, to whom, indeed, the whole estate was heavily mortgaged.

Mademoiselle de Janson had grown accustomed to her poverty—to her old ruined manor; but she had never reconciled herself to her plebeian possession, the forge. It was visible, she declared, from every window of her dwelling; and in whatever room she sat, she could hear, she averred, its clanking. To abuse and hate this enemy had become one of the chief occupations of Mademoiselle de Janson’s life.

Adèle had risen; she was standing in one of the deep windows; she looked at a wild landscape; a rugged road wound by a silent lake; rocks hemmed in her view to the left; dark mountains rose to the right, and enclosed the sheet of water; a vapoury sky of summer blue softened the hues and outlines of the scene; it looked vivid, living; eternal in its beauty.

"Cousine," suddenly said Adèle, turning round; "do tell me how you know that the world is going away."

"Listen to that forge!—there, did you hear? And you ask if the world is going away! Take your doll, and play, child."

"I have no doll, Cousine."

"Well, play all the same. Go to the garden, child. I want to be alone."

Adèle, thus dismissed, quietly left the old hall. As she closed the heavy oak door, she heard Mademoiselle de Janson repeating to herself, by the fireside, those ominous words,—“the world is going away.”

“How hard-hearted I must be,” thought Adèle, half-remorsefully. “There is Cousine telling me from morning till night, from night till morning, that the world is going away; and I sleep as well, and eat and drink as heartily, and run and laugh, and sing, and enjoy myself, just as much as if the world were standing still the whole time.”

As Adèle came to this conclusion respecting the hardness of her heart, she left to her right a heavy wooden staircase that led to the upper part of the house, and passing under a stone porch, reached the head of a flight of broken steps that descended to the yard, or, rather, court, around which the old mansion was built.

A quiet spot was that flagged and grass-grown court, silent and secluded like a cloister. Shade seemed to dwell there for evermore; it stole down

the grey stone walls that enclosed it, walls massive and rock-built, with tufts of green ferns or pale pink flowers in every cranny; it lingered around the broken windows that looked down quaint and dark with many a pane gone from its leaden casing; it slept around the damp old well in the farthest angle, and deepened the gloom of its dark round hole that went down to meet the chill, tremulous water below, where, looking over the broad stone ledge, you ever saw the blue sky reflected in a cold, white circle. But one spot gave light to this gray and quiet picture. A low, arched door stood wide open near the well; it revealed a stone staircase winding up in obscurity a long, dim passage, a second door also wide open, and beyond it, vividly distinct, a green and sunny garden.

Whilst we have been describing, Adèle was crossing the court. She peeped into the well as she went by it, then passed under the low, arched door, crossed the long, sombre corridor, and came out at the other door. A broad garden, in the old and formal style, lay before her, and beyond it, the outline of blue or wooded hills rose on the noonday sky. On a bench at the foot of a broken statue that had once guarded the entrance of a long gravelled walk, passing between stiff boxwood hedge-rows, an old peasant woman, dry and brown as a nut, in white round cap, black boddice, and striped woollen petticoat, sat in the sun, spinning her wheel with dazzling rapidity. On seeing Adèle, she nodded and smiled. The young girl smiled too, and without proceeding further, sat down on the stone step on which she had

been standing, and resting her elbow on her knee, and her cheek on her hand, she watched curiously the swift motion of the old woman's wheel.

"How fast it goes, Jeannette," she said.

"Yes, Mamzelle, very fast."

A long pause followed these two remarks. Adèle de Courcelles was then a small young girl of sixteen; her figure was childish, but perfect; her face fair—spite her brown hair—and very pretty; for her features, though slight, were clear and distinct in their outlines. She had dark eyebrows, and beneath them darker azure eyes; a quick look, a prompt, though graceful bearing, and something in her whole aspect that spoke of a rapidity of thought, speech, and feeling, that seemed not to care for time.

Her story is soon told. She was an orphan—the last of a noble and fallen line. She lived in the old manor that had been built by her ancestors, and where for ages they had flourished; but she could not call five francs her own;—she was wholly dependant on the kindness of her cousin and god-mother, Mademoiselle de Janson, who, as the daughter of an elder branch, was sole mistress of all that remained of the once splendid patrimony of the Courcelles. Their name, an empty inheritance in modern France, was all Adèle possessed.

Mademoiselle de Janson had taken charge of the little orphan, and reared her; but as the world was going away, she had spent little on her education. It would have been foolish; and as the world was going away, where was the use of caring for any-

thing in it? Adèle had grown up as she pleased, untaught, unloved, unchecked, and unheeded, and yet happy in her solitary liberty. Even as a wild flower blooms none the less sweetly than the garden blossom, for springing from the stone and growing amongst weeds; so, to all seeming, even though neglected from her childhood—even though not surrounded by love and kindness from her birth—Adèle flourished as gaily and as happily in the shade, as others in the sun.

To live—to be—to exist—was sufficient, to the last of the De Courcelles. She cared for nothing—not even for herself. Temper, character, story, she as yet had not.

Jeanette was the first to speak again.

“When I was a girl,” she said, with a sigh, “I remember seeing the spinning-wheel of Madame la Marquise de Courcelles. It was pure ivory, inlaid with gold.”

“Was it?” carelessly said Adèle.

“She was your great grandmother,” pursued Jeanette, with another sigh.

Adèle said nothing, but pulled out a blade of grass that grew in a split of the stone step on which she sat, and examined it curiously.

“She was called Adèle, like you,” continued Jeanette. “A handsome lady she was; and fine old times were those. Dozens of servants about the house—cooks, scullions, butlers, gardeners, and what not. There was not a stone wrong in the whole manor; there was not a weed in the whole garden. Sad changes, Mamzelle Adèle, sad times.”

“I dare say it is all for the best,” philosophically

said Adèle ; and throwing away her blade of grass, she skipped down the steps, passed by Jeannette with a nod, and ran, swift and light as a deer, along the sunny path.

Everywhere around her she saw ruin and decay, but she heeded them not. The hedges might run wild, the fountains might cease to play, the statues might be defaced or broken—little mattered it to the careless girl, whilst she had space, air, and liberty. And none of your modern mock gardens, that would fit in a drawing-room, with a space to walk around, was the garden of Courcelles. It was vast as a park, a sort of provincial Versailles, once famous in its day. The varied and uneven nature of the ground had with great difficulty been overcome by the obscure Le Notre, who designed alley, bosquet and parterre, and adorned every walk with its statues, and every arbour with its fountains ;—but it had been overcome—and the result was a civilized garden in the very bosom of nature ; around it wild hills, clothed with murmuring pine-trees ; and at its feet a silent lake, on which the very wind reposed, so deep and fast seemed its enchanted sleep.

That little and wild mountain-lake was one of the few friends which the solitary youth of Adèle had known, and she never passed it by without giving it a look. Bending over the broken stone balustrade, adorned with vases, where roses and geraniums still bloomed, she now gazed down dreamily. With a low splash the clear green waters washed a flight of white steps leading to the garden—and every time they retreated they left bare and shining the broken stone,

to which heavy wet mosses clung. How slow had crept the lazy sunbeams on that smooth, glassy surface. How chill and deep was the dark bed on which the pebbles slept below. And Adèle knew them all; and as long as she could remember, she had seen them lying there, visible and distinct, yet beyond reach of the rudest storm above. But she gave them no more than one look now. The sun was hot, and she longed for shade. She turned to her left, walked on through broad straight alleys, until she reached the boundary of this forsaken garden,—a high trellis, veiled by boxwood, and behind which she entered into a little grassy orchard, full of shade and sunshine. Scattered trees bent to the very earth their fruit-laden boughs,—hidden in their dark branches birds sang their last song; the blackbird and the speckled thrush leaped along, or ran lightly in the high grass; bees hummed around their sunny hive, and on an old brown wall, which enclosed this pleasant little spot, ripened peaches of rich mellow bloom. At once Adèle stretched forth her hand, plucked the ripest, and sat down in the grass to eat it. It had all the exquisite flavour and melting lusciousness of that delicious fruit, and it satisfied even an epicure of sixteen. As she threw away the stone, Adèle indolently sank down in the high grass, which closed over her.

Above her spread the green branches of an apple-tree, partly shading her from the sun, and partly revealing broad gaps of blue sky. Near her a little brook ran sparkling through the grass, rippling on a few grey stones with a broken murmur. The

warmth and peace of noonday enclosed this quiet place, and Adèle lay in the grass, happy, like any careless and wild young thing. Suddenly, and as a bird breaks out into song, she began to sing a long, monotonous, and ancient ballad, which had not yet died away from the memories of men in this retired province ; and as she sang, she thought, " Oh, no ! the world is not going away ; it is coming, coming fast."

CHAPTER III.

TIDINGS.

"SAD changes and sad times," thought Jeannette, as she sat spinning in the sun. She looked at the grey old manor frowning above her, at the lonely and ruined garden, and remembering poor little Adèle, she sighed.

"And how is our good old Jeannette to-day?" asked a soft, sleek voice close by her.

He who spoke thus was a low-built young man, with a slouching shoulder, a halting gait, and a broad sallow face, free from expression.

No sooner did she hear and see this unprepossessing individual, whom we may as well introduce at once as M. François Morel, foreman, clerk, factotum of the forge, than an expression of mingled disdain and wrath flashed over Jeannette's brown visage. But she shut her lips tight, like one resolved not to speak, and spun twice as fast as before.

"And did Jeanette, who is so good and so kind, give our letter to Mademoiselle Adèle?" asked Monsieur Morel, chuckling complacently.

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," replied Jeannette, with a sort of gasp, to which she was subject when labouring under strong and repressed emotion, "yes, sir; Mamzelle Jeannette—who is not good old Jeanette, sir—Mamzelle Jeannette did, I say, give that letter, and here is your answer, sir."

She drew from her pocket a letter, somewhat soiled and creased by its sojourn there, and disdainfully jerked it on the end of the bench on which she sat.

The little Chinese eyes of M. Morel sparkled with pleasure. He stretched out his eager hand, and snatched up the letter; but no sooner had he glanced at the name written on the back, and recognized his own official round-hand, than his countenance fell. He next examined the seal, and saw that it had not been broken. For a while, he held the letter in his hand looking at it, then he coolly took from his pocket a piece of whitey-brown paper, carefully wrapped up the letter in it, then put it, thus wrapped, in a larger and somewhat greasy pocket-book, which, after clasping carefully, he returned to the place whence it had issued—a deep side pocket.

"So she returns it unread," he said, looking up and smiling in Jeannette's face. "She had better have read it, Mamzelle Jeannette. She had better have read it. And what is more, she shall read it

some day—not now perhaps, but some day or other, Mamzelle Jeannette.”

“Oh! you threaten her, do you, you mean, sneaking fellow!” screamed Jeannette, turning pale with fury. “You, you,” she added, gasping again; “you the son of a peasant, of a valet, to think of writing love letters to Mamzelle de Courcelles; to dream of—of marrying—marrying her!”

M. Morel raised his eyebrows with seeming surprise, and put out his nether lip with great apparent disdain of the fact these words suggested.

“Marry—a little beggar like that,” he said, “who has not even five sous in her purse, like the wandering Jew! and who told you I ever wanted to marry her, or that this letter was a love-letter? Marry her, indeed. No, no, Mamzelle Jeannette; I hope I can do better than that.”

The cold, cruel disdain of this speech stung Jeannette. She looked about her for some offensive missile, and finding nothing better than a pail of water, she caught hold of it, and unhesitatingly flung its contents at the head of the offender.

M. Morel, guessing her kind intentions, stepped back, but so hastily that his foot tripped against a stone; he fell flat on his back, and in this prostrate condition was deluged from head to foot. Jeannette laughed until the tears ran down her cheek; but M. Morel rose white with rage, wiped himself with his pocket handkerchief, then said, his uplifted hand shaking as he spoke:

“Very well, Mamzelle Jeannette, we will remem-

ber this too, and enter it in our little book of accounts."

"That for your book of accounts," said Jeannette, snapping her fingers with great scorn; "and if ever you dare to set your feet here again, you shall get something else. Begone, I say," she added, stamping her foot, and her unappeased wrath again rising.

"I shall go, because I choose to go," deliberately replied M. Morel, turning away, "and I shall come here to-morrow, or after to-morrow, if I like."

"Through the key-hole of the great door?" sarcastically asked Jeannette, who was portress.

"Through the great door itself," calmly replied M. Morel. "Good morning, Mademoiselle Jeannette." He bowed with ironical politeness, and left as he had come.

Jeannette resumed her spinning and broke her thread five times successively, and forgot to note that this was a sign of calamity or death. Her brow was knit, her eyes were fixed, her lips tightly compressed.

"What can the wretch mean?" she soliloquized aloud.

"What wretch, Mamzelle Jeannette?" asked a quavering voice at her elbow.

This time the speaker was a gaunt, white-headed old servant-man, in a striped waistcoat, and loose pantaloons which he was always hitching; with strong features, deep wrinkles, and a long ungainly body, that seemed no little trouble to its owner, for

he was ever shifting it restlessly from one side to the other, like a burden he could not get rid of.

"No one," was Jeannette's tart reply to his question; "gentlemen should not listen, Monsieur Jean."

"Then ladies should not speak their thoughts aloud," returned Jean, leaning on an old garden rake, and leering at Jeannette with evident affection.

A twenty years' flirtation was going on between this ancient pair. In the world people generally tire of this pastime at the end of a few months; but the longer they carried it on, the better did Jean and Jeannette like it, perhaps because it never brought them any nearer to that end of all flirtation—marriage.

Honi soit qui mal y pense. We need not say that in feeling, speech or action, Jean never went beyond the most delicate gallantry, nor Jeannette beyond the most prudish and maidenly reserve. Slander, herself, had respected their ancient loves; she had sneered, indeed, but she had not dared to belie.

But Jeannette was not now in the mood for repartee. She shook her head, heaved a sigh, and at length observed:

"Monsieur Jean, I want to speak to you; well, you need not come and sit by me for that," she added, snappishly, as, in the simplicity of his heart, Jean did indeed think of seating himself on the end of the bench honoured with bearing her weight. "I do not see," she stiffly resumed, "any necessity for it."

"It might have been a pleasure," replied Jean, with tender reproach.

Regardless of his feelings, Jeannette obdurately returned :

"Pleasure, indeed. We are talking of business, Jean. Things," she added, pushing her wheel away with her foot, and folding her arms across her black boddice ; "things are not going on well at all."

"Very true, Mamzelle Jeannette."

"And how do you know? If I say it, I know it: that wretch Morel has had the insolence to give me a love-letter."

"A love-letter to you!" interrupted Jean, bouncing and becoming as red as a turkey-cock.

"Ah! bah, it was not for me," she pursued, yet she reddened a little. "No, no; Monsieur Morel flies at higher game, I can tell you. Bless you, the letter was for Mamzelle Adèle."

Jean stared incredulously.

"I have seen it coming a long time," resumed Jeannette. "She cannot endure Monsieur Morel, and just for that reason she is always very civil to him, and the wretch took her civility for fondness. Well, well, I knew we were fallen; but I did not know we were quite so low as all that. However, I took patience, put his letter in my pocket, and said I would give it. Now I did not do so for two reasons; one was, that I would as soon put my right hand in the fire as trouble the poor child with this abominable business; the other reason is, that I know Mademoiselle Adèle to be no better than a little Jacobin."

"Too true," sighed Jean.

"All that I have done, all that Mademoiselle de Janson has done, has failed in putting in her one atom of proper pride."

"Very sad," murmured Jean.

"Knowing this, and knowing that, instead of crushing the low fellow with a look, she would try to console him or pity him, and treat him as if he were her equal, I felt I could not trust her."

"Quite proper,—quite."

"Yes, Monsieur Jean; but by letting him think that she returns his letter unread, I may have done some harm. He looked spiteful."

"Let him."

"And a pail of water I threw in his face may not make him feel better-tempered. He left me with an odd threat."

Jean looked interrogative, whereupon Jeannette repeated, word for word, the close of her conversation with M. François Morel.

Jean made light of it, but did not succeed in setting her uneasiness at rest.

"I tell you, the wretch meant something," she persisted. "I have it," she cried, starting to her feet and slapping her brown forehead, "I have it—I tell you the English are coming."

"Coming!" ejaculated Jean; "we are not, thank Heaven, at war, Mamzelle Jeannette, and the last time the English came as allies of our legitimate sovereign Louis."

"Ah, bah!" interrupted Jeannette, impatiently; "do you not understand me, Monsieur Jean?—I

mean, the English of the Forge, the blacksmiths," she added, with intense scorn.

"Not unlikely, Mamzelle Jeannette! not unlikely!" said Jean, swaying her long body to and fro; "indeed, very likely."

"Holy Virgin!" cried Jeannette, sinking down on the bench and raising her hands above her head, "what shall we do?"

"Come, come, Mamzelle Jeannette, there is a remedy to every evil," kindly said Jean; and unchecked this time, he sat down by her side, and did his best to comfort her.

Jeannette's distress requires explanation.

The Manor, garden, and orchard of Courcelles were the property of Mademoiselle de Janson, but they had been let, along with the land on which the forge was built, to the late Mr. Osborne. Mademoiselle de Janson had, indeed, reserved for her own use a few rooms in the farthest wing of the manor, which could with ease have accommodated half-a-dozen modern families. That wing, however, having, for want of proper repair, become decayed and uninhabitable, she had, in the absence of Mr. Osborne and his family, who seldom or ever visited Courcelles, emigrated to another and more comfortable part of the dwelling, but one to which she had no real right. That her mistress should be caught trespassing by her hated English tenants, was the thought that now haunted Jeannette. She did not lose time in pondering over it; regardless of the slow and plausible arguments of her ancient admirer, who proved to her all sorts of impossible things, Jeannette

again started to her feet, and leaving him there, she darted through the door across the court and through the other door, until she reached the presence of Mademoiselle de Janson.

"That girl was always hasty," said Jean, nettled at being thus forsaken; "always."

Mademoiselle de Janson was not alone; near her chair, her hand leaning on the back of it, stood a tall and handsome lady of twenty-five, or twenty-six years at the utmost, a handsome and dark woman, with black hair, soft hazel eyes, straight, regular features, and a gentle though grave countenance.

At once Jeannette recognised Madame Lascours, the wife of an old and wealthy manufacturer, who lived across the narrow lake near which the Manor of Courcelles was built. On hearing the door of the old Hall open, Madame Lascours slowly turned round, and raising her forefinger, she silently warned Jeannette not to enter.

The old servant withdrew on tiptoe, but not before perceiving that the face of Mademoiselle de Janson was buried in her hands. Anxious and uneasy, she remained outside the closed door, and sat down on the last of the oak steps of the massive staircase that led to the upper apartments; there she waited and listened for a long while, during which the Hall remained silent as a grave. At length the door opened, and Madame Lascours came forth, and merely saying, "You may go in to your mistress, Jeannette," she inquired after Adèle, and on hearing that she was in the garden, went to seek her there, whilst Jeannette, burning with curiosity, to say the

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truth, again sought the presence of Mademoiselle de Janson. But Mademoiselle de Janson was precisely as usual, fantastic, capricious, wayward, neither in nor out of temper, but something between both. Jeannette's declaration that the English were coming, she received with great indifference.

"Let them come," she said, and her little mouth indulged in a most unromantic yawn.

"But, Madame!" exclaimed Jeannette, "I fancy, from what Morel said, that they may come to-morrow."

"Let them come by all means," was the impatient answer.

"And the rooms?" hesitatingly suggested Jeannette.

"Rooms! what, rooms?" haughtily asked her mistress; then in a cool and distant tone she added, "Jeannette, you are a fool! did you for a moment imagine I was here without the knowledge of the late Mr. Osborne?"

"Late! Holy Virgin! is he dead?"

"Of course he is—why should he not die?—We all must die. Why should not he?—He died a fortnight back in England, and I dare say his son is coming to take possession. What about it all, Jeannette?"

And sitting back in her chair, Mademoiselle de Janson balanced one of her little feet up and down, and superciliously looked at Jeannette through her half-shut eyes; and as she saw that Jeannette stared at her in evident bewilderment, she added, with a royal wave of the hand—

"You may go, Jeannette."

And Jeannette, thoroughly disconcerted by the coolness and strange manner of her mistress, withdrew.

Madame Lascours slowly walked through the old garden until she reached the orchard; there she paused, looking in vain for Adèle. At length she caught sight of some dark object, partly visible through the grass; she drew nearer, and found the young girl lying under the apple-tree, coiled round like a spaniel, and fast asleep. Madame Lascours was too well acquainted with the wild habits of Adèle to be much surprised; yet she half smiled as she looked down at her. In passing through the garden she had plucked a twig of luxuriant box-wood,—she now dropped it on the young girl's face. Adèle started up, awake at once.

"Alice, Alice!" she cried, joyfully throwing her arms around the neck of her friend, and embracing her with eager warmth—"Oh! I am so glad! I am so glad!"

She laughed in the fulness of her joy, and her blue eyes sparkled with delight.

One was but a girl, and the other was a woman,—a woman, too, older and sadder than her years; they met rarely, and never for any length of time; their tempers, their very natures differed; their position had no more in common than had their daily life; yet strong love bound them,—love all the stronger, perhaps, because it could not be easily indulged.

M. Lascours was old and eccentric; he covered his wife with jewels; he clothed her in the richest

of attire ; he indulged her every wish ; but though she was young, beautiful, and gentle, he seemed restless and unhappy, and Alice looked grave and sad. They had been married seven years ; but their union was childless, and they lived in solitary state and cheerless splendour, in a modern and luxurious villa, of which Adèle had never crossed the threshold. Its master had never asked her to do so ; and Adèle, all the prouder that she was so poor, would not go unasked. She did not know that he was scarcely conscious of her existence ; she could not guess the strange and sad reserve in which he and his young bride lived ; a reserve which did not prevent affection and strong esteem on either side, and for which there existed two sufficient reasons,—misanthropic sensitiveness on the part of the husband, and excess of submission on that of the wife. He was too proud to say to her—" Love me, and be frank and happy ;" and she was too anxious to forestall his least wishes, to guess that he would have wished, above all, to see in her the free and fearless bearing of a happy woman. And thus they went on, not estranged nor yet united.

For some reason or other, Madame Lascours imagined that her husband would not see Adèle with pleasure, and thus she never ventured to ask the young girl to come and see her. Indeed, it seemed tacitly agreed between the two friends that this subject should never even be alluded to between them, and it never was.

" This is a pretty place," said Madame Lascours, looking around the green and sunny orchard, and

something like sadness passed over her whole countenance, and lingered in her soft hazel eyes.

"Come, and look at my peaches," enthusiastically said Adèle, passing her arm within that of her friend.

Madame Lascours shook her head.

"Not to-day," she replied, with a sigh, "not to-day." And she led the way back through the garden.

"Sit down here," said Adèle, leading her to an old broken bench that stood in a ruined arbour, facing a dilapidated fountain. Madame Lascours looked irresolute, but, after a moment's pause, she turned away.

"Not here, not to-day," she said. For a few minutes she walked on quickly, then she slackened her pace, and went lingeringly up the sunny avenue. Adèle, too impatient for that slow progress, darted around her, gathering flowers, plucking weeds, binding up the hedge, and, above all, talking, whilst Madame Lascours said not one word, but looked around her in sad silence. At length they reached the quiet court, and there Madame Lascours paused, and said, with some emotion, "I thought to tell you in the orchard, then in the garden, but my heart failed me, and I now must tell you here—Adèle, I shall come and see you no more."

"No more!" exclaimed Adèle, turning slightly pale, "and why so?"

"Because—because the Osbornes are coming," said Madame Lascours, in a low tone; "my husband does not like them; he would say nothing; he never

does say anything ; but he might not like it.—I must not come.”

“Poor Alice !” said Adèle, unable to repress the compassionate ejaculation.

“No, no, you must not pity me,” eagerly said Madame Lascours, and reddening a little ; “you do not understand the case at all ; you do not understand my husband ; he is peculiar—very peculiar ; but he is the best and most generous of men.”

“Are you happy ?” bluntly asked Adèle.

“As happy as a man who is not happy himself can make me,” replied Madame Lascours.

Adèle had passed her arm within that of her friend, and as they spoke, they paced the narrow court up and down.

“Alice, how did you ever make up your mind to marry a man so very much older than yourself ?” asked the young girl, for the first time touching on this delicate subject.

Twice they walked as far as the old wall, and twice came back to a low, grass-grown door facing it, before Madame Lascours seemed able to answer that question. At length, she said—

“I was not consulted, Adèle. Monsieur Lascours was rich ; we were very poor. He asked my mother, but she did not ask me.”

“But the mayor asked you, and the priest asked you ?” objected Adèle, opening her eyes, and seeming amazed ; “why did you not say no, instead of saying yes ?”

An expression of deep discouragement passed

over the handsome face of Madame Lascours. She bowed her head and sighed.

"Adèle," she said, "no mother would tell you, 'child, you are to marry Monsieur so and so, on such a day;' for though you are little and childish, and though you look careless and light, there is firm purpose in you—purpose and inexorable will. But I, God help me! I am like the reed, made to bend. I tell you I was born to yield and obey—to be conquered and ever broken."

With grave and sad wonder, Adèle heard this confession, and, looking up in the bent face of her friend as she uttered it, she hesitatingly suggested—"Do you not really think, Alice, you could manage to have a will of your own?"

"What should I do with it? Will! I should not know how to use will!"

"Oh, it is quite easy, I assure you," eagerly replied the young girl? "only try, and you will see."

Madame Lascours kindly looked down in the face of her little friend.

"Have you ever hesitated about anything in your little life?" she asked.

"Of course I have. When the pedlar came this spring, I hesitated a good deal between a pink muslin and a blue one."

"Did you really? And pray for how long?"

"Ten minutes."

"Amazing! well, I should hesitate ten days, ten months and ten years if you like, and never know which I liked best; the pink or the blue. Nay, more, whichever I chose I should find ten reasons

at least for regretting that I had not chosen the other, and I would turn the matter over in my brain until I felt sick and weary of it, and life and everything."

"Oh! then," resignedly said Adèle, "you should get some one to choose for you."

"And is not that what I do, child, when I let others act for me? If I did not do so, I should perplex life away in wondering where my real duty lay, and what path it was God's will that I should take and follow. I have concluded in my own mind, that when God gives judgment and strong will, he means both to be exercised; but that when either one or the other fails, the only safe way left to serve Him is obedience. I have obeyed my mother, I now obey my husband, and humbly do I hope that in so doing I fulfil the daily petition we all utter: 'Thy will be done.'"

She spoke low, perhaps because, spite her resignation, it might sadden her to acknowledge how far her will failed to shape and guide her life, perhaps because she dreaded being overheard from any of the windows that overlooked the court which they still paced up and down. Adèle did not seem to heed or hear her, for she came back to the old argument.

"Alice, I assure you it is not difficult at all. You have only to desire a thing very much."

"And what if I cannot? What if some cannot desire?" interrupted Madame Lascours, with a sad smile. "What if Desire, which is Will's twin sister, belong to a certain warmth of heart and fulness of

being not granted to me? Where then is the remedy? But we must not talk metaphysics," she observed, changing the subject of discourse, and evidently not inclined to renew it. "I know not how I came to talk so much about myself. Besides, we are both forgetting to say what must be said: Good bye."

She stopped short as she spoke, and laying her hand on the shoulder of Adèle, she looked down sadly in her face. Somewhat wistfully Adèle returned the look. In spite of all Madame Lascours had said, the young girl still did not understand her friend; so foreign were this helpless weakness and unconditional submission to her free and decisive temper. But she kept her wonder to herself, and merely observed:

"Good bye then, Alice; I saw you once every three months—when am I to see you now?"

This question Madame Lascours did not answer. She gave one sad, very sad look around the court, then sighed, passed underneath the porch, crossed the wide hall, and only paused when she reached the front gate, which Adèle reluctantly opened.

The bright, vivid landscape of mountain and sky, with a quiet lake asleep and glittering in the sun, suddenly flashed before them. An avenue of trees once led from the Manor to the margin of the lake, but it had long since vanished, and the rude old dwelling now rose alone and unsheltered, exposed to every blast of the passing winds.

"Do you see those two large moss-grown stumps?" said Madame Lascours to her young companion.

"They were stately trees when I was a child—centuries old, tradition said."

"That was long ago, before my time," gravely answered Adèle; "and do you know, Alice, I like the Manor best as it is, half-ruined, without trees, without avenue, a gray, old dwelling. There is not a window but the sun gets in through it and makes the stone rooms warm and pleasant. There is not a cranny but some wild weed or wilder flower grows in it. A fig then for the cold and gloomy times when trees shut out the sun, and neither weed nor wild flower had room to grow."

"Good bye," said Alice; "come no farther; your cousin might not like it. And before I go, let me say a few words: my husband is kind, very kind. If ever you need me, do not wait to send; come yourself at once; indeed, never send for me: Come."

She stooped, kissed the young girl's cheek, then lowered her veil, and quickly walked down to the water's edge. Adèle stood looking until she saw her enter a boat, which swiftly shot across the lake. She then re-entered the house, closed the door, and went back to the garden; but in passing through the court she paused a moment. For the first time the shadow of the spot fell on her young heart.

From that day she never crossed the place, but the sad and handsome face of Alice seemed to rise before her, and she never remembered her friend, but the cloister-like gloom of the solitary court which had heard her melancholy confessions, seemed to surround her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAVELLER.

RUDE and wild, yet not without beauty, is that part of France which stretches from the deep fastnesses of the Jura to the rich vineyards of sunny Burgundy. It is a land of many hills, and pastoral valleys, in which countless flocks feed in peace; of forest-covered mountains, yielding stone and iron, more precious than gold to man; of rapid young rivers, whose rushing waters feed a thousand clattering mills; a land where the wildness of the desert, and the commerce of the city, meet in peace beneath nature's smile.

The sun was setting, as Mr. Osborne reached one of the wildest spots of this wild district. The carriage-road ended with the little town of Angeville. There Mr. Osborne had left his luggage, and ridden on alone, through a narrow valley, that shortened his journey a full half day. He had not re-entered the road more than ten minutes, when a sudden turning brought him within view of a little mountain-lake. He reined in his horse, and stood

still. Behind and before him stretched hills and their valleys, seen vague and dim in the mild light of grey evening. The wheels of factories and of mills were at rest ; but there was a sound of the rushing of streams coming down from rocky heights, and a low murmur, as of the wind, passing high in the air above them. Below the road lay the lake. It looked both cool and deep. Its still waters, clear and green as emerald, wound away in the shadow of steep mountains. A thousand feet and more they rose above it ; blue mists, softly curling at their feet to lie and sleep there until the coming of the morn, whilst across their pine-clad peaks swiftly passed the sunset's burning glow.

As Mr. Osborne stood looking at and admiring a scene both wild and beautiful, the sound of the evening bell rose from the little belfry of a white church standing across the lake. In Italy, this pious and beautiful custom is called the Ave Maria ; in France it is known as the " Angelus," from the first word of the prayer, which, on hearing it, the faithful repeat,—the prayer uttered evening after evening by thousands of hearts, to commemorate for ever the wonderful tidings which " the angel of the Lord declared unto Mary."

The sound thrilled through his very heart. It recalled the Ave Maria of his beloved south. The wide Campagna, growing purple and dark beneath the pale starry sky, again spread before him ; he beheld once more the azure seas of the Neapolitan shores, with those islands, around which the charm of the syren for ever lingers ; then the bright vision

suddenly vanished, and he saw himself in a French valley as rude and wild as any nook of northern scenery in his own land. He slowly rode on; gloom gathered around his path; the brightness passed from the mountains to the sky, where the last rosy flush soon faded away into space. Above the lake the cry of a bird, wild and melancholy like that of the plover, suddenly broke, wakening into life the dead-like stillness of the spot, but as abruptly died away. The farther the journeyer rode on, the wilder grew the scenery around him. At length he began to wonder whether he would soon reach, or whether he had unwittingly passed, the place of his destination—Courcelles. He looked around him with a glance that searched far into the deepening obscurity. The lake still lay to his right, on his left stretched a rugged valley, dark with rustling pines, but human home or dwelling he saw not. "I must have passed it," he thought; but scarcely had he inwardly uttered the words, when he was suddenly dazzled by the ruddy and vivid glow of an open forge blazing at some distance before him, but which a projecting rock had until then completely concealed from his view. He pricked his jaded horse and rode on; the road was narrow and dark, and the very brightness of the forge seemed to render it darker; and thus it came to pass, that what with his haste, and what with the darkness, Mr. Osborne rode straight against a peaceable individual, who was quietly walking from the forge towards him, and knocked him down. An energetic oath assured him that the sufferer was not killed; he therefore calmly inquired with what

the vivacious French have called *le flegme Britannique*.

"Have I hurt you?"

"Hurt me!" exclaimed, with a sort of scream, the injured one, rising and indulging in a volley of fresh oaths; "you knock me down, and you say, 'Have I hurt you?' Perhaps you have, a little."

"I am sorry for it," drily said Mr. Osborne—and his tone was as even as if he had said, "I am glad." He could not see either the face or figure of the man against whom he had unwittingly stumbled, but the very sound of his shrieking, falsetto voice was antipathetic to him, and being very like a woman in his aversions and his likings, Mr. Osborne disliked the owner of that voice from that night and that hour.

That unlucky individual, who was no other, indeed, than M. François Morel, was in his turn struck by a slight foreign accent lurking in the tones of Mr. Osborne, who otherwise spoke French like a Frenchman; and softening down with amazing rapidity, and changing his voice from its naturally sharp key to the assumed soft sleekness which, through long habit, had become almost as natural to him as his own tones, he inquired, insinuatingly,—

"Will Monsieur excuse me? But is not Monsieur—perhaps Monsieur Osborne—whom we are all so anxiously expecting at Courcelles?"

"All!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, "are they come, then?"

"No one has arrived as yet," eagerly replied Morel, "no one excepting Monsieur. But we were

fearing lest something had happened to Monsieur ; and indeed, I am afraid that I may have been the unfortunate cause of inflicting some injury on Monsieur, or perhaps on Monsieur's horse?"

"You are more likely to have been the sufferer," impatiently interrupted Mr. Osborne ; "but who are you ? You seem to belong to the place."

"I am François Morel, Monsieur's foreman, to serve him ; and I had the honour to receive a letter from Monsieur the other day, and of answering it, as, perhaps, Monsieur will have the goodness to remember."

"I recollect it. This, then, is the forge ; I cannot see the Manor."

"Will Monsieur allow me to take the bridle of his horse, and to lead him to it at once ?" eagerly asked the complaisant foreman ; "the road has not been mended this year, and is scarcely safe."

This was not true ; but though Mr. Osborne could not see that the road was perfectly safe, and therefore could not contradict M. Morel's statement, he declined availing himself of his offer, and alighted at once. M. Morel still zealously volunteered to lead the horse, but his new master coldly declined.

"Then perhaps Monsieur will allow me to show Monsieur the way ?" persisted M. Morel.

"Yes—you may do that."

The way was not long ; scarcely more than a hundred yards did it extend,—for M. Morel did not lead Mr. Osborne to the front gate, but to a garden-door, which was seldom locked, so wild and desolate had the garden become.

"I will fasten the horse of Monsieur to the iron stanchion here," said Morel, "and then I shall have the honour of showing Monsieur the way."

Monsieur did not wait to bestow on him that honour; two years of his youth had been spent in the old Manor—he knew every inch of the ground and every turning of every staircase. Without hesitation he crossed the garden and entered the court. He was ascending the flight of steps that led to the main body of the building, when he was overtaken by Monsieur Morel, who had breathlessly followed on his steps, and now whispered with seeming hesitation—

"May I ask if Monsieur means to sleep here to night?"

"Why, of course I do! There is some servant or other in charge of the house; is there not?"

M. Morel coughed dubiously; Mr. Osborne reiterated his question.

"Why, the truth is," answered the foreman with great apparent reluctance, "that I forgot to tell Monsieur—hem—that two ladies—hem—and their servants have taken possession of the only good rooms in the Manor."

"Ladies! what ladies?" asked Mr. Osborne very much surprised.

"Did not Monsieur really know? I am sorry that I mentioned—"

"What ladies?" again asked Mr. Osborne, and this time he spoke rather sharply.

"Only Mademoiselle de Janson and her little god-daughter, Sir."

Mr. Osborne impatiently walked up and down the court, and a frown of displeasure, which no one could see, gathered on his brow. He was a sensitive, reserved man; he had come alone to Courcelles, thinking to find there privacy and solitude, and it could not be much to his taste thus to find two ladies unexpectedly established in his home.

"Why did I not know of this earlier?" he asked stopping short.

"I thought Monsieur knew."

"Is there any inn, or place of entertainment near here?"

"There is a very comfortable inn, indeed, the Lion d'Argent, of which the hostess is my particular friend, six leagues off," meekly replied M. Morel; "a very good inn indeed."

"Six leagues! Then there is no help for it; you must present my compliments to Mademoiselle de Janson, and beg of her to excuse me for appearing before her in this state and at this hour; you may add—"

Here, with many excuses for interrupting Monsieur, M. Morel, spite all his previous obsequiousness, now humbly but positively declined delivering this message. There was a coolness, an unfortunate coolness, in the motives of which he would rather not enter, between him and Mademoiselle de Janson; in short, it would not be pleasant for him to intrude on that lady as the bearer of unwelcome tidings, and he must beg, to his infinite regret, to be excused.

"It is not of the least consequence," quietly said Mr. Osborne, surprised, however, at the refusal;

"I suppose I can find a servant to deliver the message."

"I am afraid that Monsieur cannot," meekly rejoined M. Morel; "from my knowledge of the habits of the family, I am afraid that Monsieur will have to proceed himself to the Hall, where Mademoiselle de Janson sits every evening."

"Very well," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne. "That can be done."

"And shall I send any one to take charge of Monsieur's horse?"

"You will oblige me by doing so."

"And shall I come and take Monsieur's orders to-morrow morning?" inquired M. Morel.

"By all means."

"Then I have the honour to bid Monsieur a very good night."

And with a deep bow, M. Morel took his leave.

"I shall detest that man," thought Mr. Osborne. He looked around him.

The moon was slowly rising, and, though not visible, she half filled with gray dawning light the silent court; the other half was still deep in shade. Mr. Osborne took a few turns up and down, absorbed in sad thoughts, of which a few were not merely sad, but bitter. The aspect of the place had summoned them from the depths of the past; like spectres called up from their long sleep, they gathered around him, murmuring in his ear, "Discontented heart, why hast thou disturbed us from our repose?"

With an impatient motion of the head he shook them away, and again ascended the flight of steps.

A ray of light, and the sound of a voice reading aloud, guided him to a half-open door ; he knocked gently, and receiving no reply, he pushed it open, then paused on the threshold and advanced no further. He saw an old Hall, vast and high, with stone walls and dark shadowy roof. On a table apart burned a solitary lamp, and in the vastness of the room it looked like a white and opaque globe of flame ; its light contrasted, but did not blend with that of a ruddy wood fire blazing on the hearth of an old chimney of sculptured stone. To the right, a dark oak panel gave back the red and vivid glow ; to the left, a range of windows showed, distinct and clear, the sombre outline of mountains on the sky with a quivering star shining above them, far in the blue depths. With a rapid glance, Mr. Osborne embraced these details, even whilst his eye seemed to rest on a group of four persons, who knelt in a circle, and were evidently engaged in repeating the evening prayer. One was a lady no longer young, but still beautiful, who held a heavy missal, from which she read aloud, in a clear and distinct voice ; near her knelt a girl, with a still, young face and childish figure, and further on, two old brown and harsh-featured domestics, a man and a woman, completed the picture. The appearance and half entrance of Mr. Osborne did not seem to have produced the least impression on this kneeling group. Still she who read went on. Desiring to be dissolved and to be with Christ ; praying for the preservation of the just, for the conversion of the sinner, for mariners at sea, for travellers on their journey, for the weary and the

afflicted, for protection through the night, for the guardianship of holy angels, and for guidance to life everlasting, until, closing the book, she added, in a low, faltering voice, the petition which long habit had impressed on her memory, "And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace."

"Amen," said the low voice of Adèle, and they all rose.

Mr. Osborne came forward, and Mademoiselle de Janson advanced a few steps towards him. They had met many years before; but she recognized him at once, and did not allow him to utter his name.

"You are William Osborne," she said, as she held out her hand, like one greeting an old friend.

They looked at one another attentively; and rather sadly Mademoiselle de Janson smiled.

"There have been many changes since we met, have there not?" she asked. "Well, 'tis no matter now—is it? Time teaches how to bear all things, and consoles for every sorrow. Adèle, child, bid me good-night and go; and you, Jeannette, see that nothing is wanted in the room I told you to prepare to-day."

Adèle held up her cheek for her godmother to kiss, then quietly left the room; the two servants followed her out, Mademoiselle de Janson and Mr. Osborne remained alone. She pointed to a seat, and sank back pale and languid in her own chair.

"And so," she said after a moment's silence, "you have lost your father. After sacrificing you, as he once sacrificed me, to his commercial ambition, he

died. Like the man in the gospel, he has left house and land behind him. The granary in which he husbanded his wheat is full, but where is the master of the harvest? Do not think," she added after a pause, "that I speak in resentment, or in evil triumph. My anger against him was so far dead that I accepted favours from him, else you would not find me here in your house! Now, however, I need not say, that is over. I shall leave to-morrow."

"Not on my account, I hope," said Mr. Osborne, speaking for the first time.

"On your account precisely," replied the lady. "You are too like him; I never could look at you, but the past would rise before me. But that is not my only motive. Of course his widow and his children will come here soon—I need not tell you one roof could never shelter me and that woman."

Mr. Osborne had been pacing the Hall up and down with folded arms and head pensively inclined; he paused before Mademoiselle de Janson's chair, and with a quiet smile, he said:

"Is it so very hard to forgive a scheming woman?"

"You are a man," passionately exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson; "you have the world, life, struggles, hardships, ambitions, hopes, everything to help you to forget. I am a woman—that is to say, I may sit by the fireside and brood over the past, until it becomes a living present, for ever torturing and haunting me. I forgive fully, fully to the seventy times seven: but I cannot forget."

A flush rose to her cheek, then died away until it

settled in a bright burning spot. Mr. Osborne drew his chair close to hers and sat down by her side.

"And if you leave," he kindly asked, "where do you go?"

"To a convent in Lyons. I went there when she came here five years ago. I shall go early to-morrow; so," she added, rising, "good night and good bye."

"Good bye, then, since you will have it so!" said Mr. Osborne. "Is there any wish of yours that I can comply with?"

"None. I am no longer mistress here. Your father paid Jean to attend to the garden, and Jeanette to attend to the house, but they would insist on considering themselves my servants; I dare say you can enter into the feeling, and not wonder much at them."

"I should rather wonder if they thought otherwise."

"Then once more good night."

She gave him her hand; he pressed it with a warmth unusual for him, but the wayward fit had returned to Mademoiselle de Janson, and she looked cold and distant.

"I have a request to make," she said, formally. "May I trust you will comply with it?"

"Most certainly, if it be in my power."

"I am not likely to ask you to do anything not in your power. I cannot take with me my cousin and god-daughter, Mademoiselle de Courcelles; she will remain here in some of the rooms which the agreement with your late father made mine. Should

Madame Osborne and her daughters choose to see and frequent Adèle, I do not oppose it; it may please her, and it can do her no harm."

"Rely upon it she shall meet with every attention and courtesy," said Mr. Osborne with some warmth.

"Thank you," very coldly replied Mademoiselle de Janson, "I ask for nothing of the kind. Pray let the ladies act as they like; notice or neglect her, it matters very little. My request concerns your behaviour to her."

"Mine!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, much surprised,

"Precisely. And my request is this: whatever you may learn, tell her nothing: she knows nothing. She is a good-natured, foolish little thing—a mere child, without will, wish, or desire. I wish her to stay so."

Mr. Osborne looked surprised, but Mademoiselle de Janson entered into no explanation. Again she extended to him her little hand, and with the intimation that Jeannette would do anything for him that he required, she took a majestic leave of Mr. Osborne.

CHAPTER V.

MR. OSBORNE'S SUPPER.

"HE is very handsome," thought Adèle, as she retired; "almost as handsome as the picture of the Knight of Malta, up-stairs."

We need not say that the young girl thought of Mr. Osborne, with whose appearance she had been much struck. Absorbed in her devotions, she had not perceived him until she rose from her knees; she then saw him enter the room,—a tall, pale, and handsome man, bareheaded, and wrapped in a travelling-cloak; and, as it so chanced, that Mr. Osborne was the first very handsome man, above the class of a peasant, whom the eyes of Adèle had beheld, we must not be surprised that these thoughts occurred to her, as she closed the door of the Hall, and even followed her up-stairs to her room.

It was a favourite axiom with Mademoiselle de Janson, that men and women were not what they had been—an axiom which Adèle could not possibly contradict; for the excellent reason that her experience was limited to men and women present, and

did not deal with men and women past. Still, she had doubts, and very strong ones, that Mademoiselle de Janson might be mistaken ; and these doubts recurred to her with great force as she sat alone in her room, opposite an old mirror in a tarnished frame. She had begun by thinking Mr. Osborne almost as handsome as the Knight of Malta. She now thought him rather handsomer. Then she wondered—if races did really degenerate—how much handsomer than Mr. Osborne must have been Mr. Osborne's great-grandfather. But though she sat opposite the mirror, and though it reflected a fair young face, and a light young figure, graceful in its attitude of thought and abandon, she never asked herself how much less or more pretty than her venerable great-grandmother was Adèle de Courcelles.

Yet that young lady knew quite well that she was a pretty girl, for Jeannette told her so every day, and even Mademoiselle de Janson, spite the decay of races in general, and of the human species in particular, had several times given her, in the course of her evening lecture, that piece of information ; but somehow or other the subject could not dwell in her thoughts. She was pretty ; she knew it ; and there was an end of the matter for Adèle.

The entrance of Jeannette broke on her speculations ; she burst in, breathless and bewildered.

" Well, what is the matter ? " asked Adèle, with calm surprise.

Jeannette wrung her hands and shook her head.

" He—he—wants a supper ! " she at length gasped.

Adèle looked a little startled and dismayed.

"Supper!" she echoed,—“have you spoken to Marrainne?”

“She is in her room.”

Now, it was a rule in the little household of Mademoiselle de Janson, that this lady was never, unless in case of fire, to be intruded upon or disturbed.

“And she left you no orders?”

“None.”

“And what is there in the larder?”

“Nothing.”

Adèle shook her head, and evidently thought this no light matter.

“And he wants to sup,” pitifully said Jeannette, “and he says he is desperately hungry.”

“Poor fellow!” compassionately exclaimed Adèle; “he must eat, Jeannette,” she added, rising and speaking resolutely.

Jeannette looked as if she thought this was more easily said than done. But she was accustomed to yield, in great emergencies, to the superior energy and decision of her young mistress, and she now obediently followed her down stairs.

Amongst the many peculiarities of the lovely Mademoiselle de Janson, there was one which sometimes proved a source of inconvenience to her household. She either forgot to eat herself, or forgot to provide for the eating of others. Apparently it had not occurred to her on the present occasion, either that Mr. Osborne would need some refreshment, or that there was positively nothing to offer him; for after giving him the lofty intimation that he had only to ask Jeannette for anything he wanted, in order to

obtain it, she had retired to her own room, leaving Jeannette to satisfy him as best she might.

Decision, and that quickness which embraces all things in one rapid glance, now marked the generalship of Adèle. She lightly ran down stairs, proceeded at once to the cold and vacant room, which was Jeannette's pantry, opened the ponderous oaken safe or buffet, and ascertained that, with the exception of two stale loaves, it was really empty.

Adèle folded her arms, and shook her head French fashion.

"The world was made out of nothing," she said, in a mock heroic tone; "but how are we to give Monsieur Osborne a supper out of nothing? Impossible, is it not, eh, Jeannette?" she added, turning towards the old servant.

"I told you so, Mamzelle," was the sorrowful reply.

A merry and triumphant smile curled the rosy lip of Adèle. She put her hand in her pocket and took out a bright two-franc piece.

"You see that, Jeannette," she said, holding it up to the height of Jeannette's eyes; "well, then, take it to widow Catherine, get cream, eggs, and butter, and make one of your own omelets."

"And I shall say," glibly put in Jeannette, "that the ham is spoiled, and that the chickens are too hard for Monsieur."

Adèle reddened; she was not aristocratic or proud, but she had something in her of her ancient blood; for she was too loyal and too true to like a lie. A little haughtily she turned on the old servant, and said, drily,—

"Say nothing, Jeannette. We are poor, and he knows it. And now," she added, more gaily, "make haste, like a good girl—or, rather, no. I shall make the omelet. You go and fetch a bottle of good wine from the cellar ; go," she continued, seeing that Jeannette hesitated. "Marrainne gave me a dozen last year ; so you see I can dispose of one."

Jeannette shook her head, but obeyed.

The fire was dying away on the hearth of the old Hall ; Mr. Osborne seated in Mademoiselle de Janson's chair, watched its fading embers. He was too tired and too hungry for active thought, but not for memory. Images of the past rose before him, not pleasing or lovely, but absorbing ; he did not heed the opening door, he did not hear a light footstep cross the floor ; he saw and heard nothing until a slender figure stood on the hearth before him ; he then looked up and beheld Adèle.

"Your fire is going out," she said, looking straight in his face with a glance which he liked, for it was open and fearless, and spoke of truth, innocent and strong.

With some curiosity he too looked at her, remembering the warning he had received concerning this little girl, as at first sight she still seemed, but he had not leisure to look long ; Adèle turned away from his gaze, knelt on the earth, gathered together the decaying embers, and with her breath fanned them once more into flame. She then rose gravely

and turning towards Mr. Osborne, said, very seriously, "How tired you must be!"

Mr. Osborne did not answer at once—her aspect, her manner took him by surprise; she was small as a child, but perfect as a woman; dark and fair, free in speech, modest in look, a creature of contrasts to which native and unsought grace gave harmony.

"She is extremely pretty," he thought, and it was only after a while that he recollected himself sufficiently to reply with a polite acknowledgment that he was rather tired.

"Your supper is coming," continued Adèle, "we can only offer you an omelet with bread and old wine."

Mr. Osborne smiled, and assured her that, hungry as he then was, bread and wine alone would have been most acceptable.

"Oh! but there is an omelet besides," rather jealously observed the young girl, "though I dare say, you are like me—I could eat anything when I am hungry. Why, here is Jeannette!" she added with a start, "and the cloth not laid."

At once she unfolded and spread on the table a snow-white cloth, which she had put on a chair on entering the room. Jeannette saw the act, and turned crimson.

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle," she murmured, as she laid down the dish containing the omelet.

"Ah! bah!" said Adèle, shaking her pretty head, "one is neither more nor less for laying a cloth. Here, Jean," she added turning to the old man, who now appeared bearing on a tray a sub-

stantial bottle covered with cobwebs, an ancient crystal glass, and a silver spoon and fork. From him she turned to Mr. Osborne, and said, frankly: "We had nothing else to offer you. I am sorry you had to wait."

Mr. Osborne, who had been watching her nimble and agile motions, with a surprised and pleased glance, assured her, with a smile, that the fare she had so kindly provided, was more than sufficient.

"Well then, good night," she said with a friendly nod, and retiring with Jeannette, she left him alone with the old man.

At the close of a silent and quickly despatched meal, Mr. Osborne rose, and Jean, divining his wishes with French quickness, led him at once to his apartment. Laying down on a small round table, the old-fashioned brass lamp which he held, he inquired, in a doleful voice, if Monsieur wanted anything, and receiving a brief negative reply, he withdrew.

The apartment in which Mr. Osborne thus remained alone, was on the ground floor of the Manor. It was a vast and dreary room of silent aspect; the bed was piled up high, and the long white curtains swept from the lofty ceiling to the dark floor. Shadows lurked in every corner, and reposed around every piece of antiquated furniture; a long dark mirror stood at the further end, and reflected the dull light of the lamp burning dimly. A half-open door showed Mr. Osborne that this melancholy bedroom communicated with some other apartment. He took the lamp, crossed the floor, and entered a simply

furnished sitting room. He laid down the lamp, and remembering this apartment, he went and opened a French window which led him to a small terrace or balcony, that in its turn led by a flight of steps to the garden.

The moon hung above a lonely hill ; with alluring and irresistible voice she called him forth. We all love Nature, but different is the intensity of our love, different too, its kind. Fitful and ardent was that of William Osborne, for though the only prose he wrote was letter prose, though of poetry he was guiltless, yet he too was a poet, in all save the passionate desire of utterance, the poet's crowning gift. Never could he have been one amongst the great tribe of geniuses that command the age in which they are born, that rule it with iron will, and thrill it with delight, admiration and terror ; but he might have been one of those sweet and hidden voices that find their echo in a few human hearts, and are heard and blest for evermore.

But indolence and fastidiousness alike kept him silent. Sufficient was it to him to enjoy the quiet hour, the lovely spot that charm the poet's heart. To others he left both poet's song and poet's fame. And thus on this night, when mountain, lake, and sky wooed him in all their beauty, he troubled not himself to find expression for that which he felt, but heart and soul he surrendered himself to the spell of the place and the hour.

At length the air grew chill, clouds passed across the sky, the moon waxed pale and dim, white, wreathing mists rose from the lake, and turning back,

Mr. Osborne took a slow walk around the old garden.

The wind was keen, and he walked within the shelter of the ancient Manor. With regret, he noticed its decay, and scanned the broken windows and sunken roof. A sound of voices soon diverted his attention. He looked, and perceived that they proceeded from one of the lower rooms; its windows owned no shutters, and the light of a lamp burning on the table rendered everything within distinctly visible, whilst a broken pane perfidiously allowed every sound to escape out in the night air. The room was wide, but poorly furnished; the speakers were Jeannette and her young mistress. The old woman sat spinning; Adèle stood opposite her in a musing attitude. Her hands were clasped; her head was bent; her profile was distinct and clear on the background of brown stone behind her. Suddenly she looked up, and spoke—

“He is handsomer than the Knight of Malta, is he not, Jeannette?”

Jeannette was confounded; her wheel paused; her mouth opened.

“Holy Virgin, Mamzelle!” she said, at length, “what can have put such a fancy as that into your head?”

“Fancy! it is no fancy!” coolly replied Adèle, “I am certain of what I say. Did I not look at him? I tell you I did, and that he is very handsome. What shall we give him for breakfast to-morrow, Jeannette?”

“Anything you like, Mamzelle,” sharply replied

Jeannette, "anything. You have already given him one of your dozen of wine such as there is not in all Burgundy, a dozen that was for your wedding breakfast, as you know very well, Mamzelle. You have spent the little silver you had in buying him eggs and cream."

"How cross you are with the poor gentleman," interrupted Adèle, smiling; "was he not a stranger? must we not practise hospitality, Jeannette?"

"Yes, Mamzelle; but to go and give one of the dozen that was for your wedding day, and which he drank down," says Jean, "as coolly as if it were new milk—"

"I gave him the best I had," again interrupted Adèle, "and I would do it again, Jeannette."

She spoke good-humouredly, but wilfully. Her face was turned towards Mr. Osborne; he looked at it awhile, struck with its delicate outlines and happy serenity; then, not caring to hear more of a discourse which touched on him so closely, he turned away, and passed on.

CHAPTER VI.

FOREWARNINGS.

THE sun was rising bright in his field of blue sky ; he touched with orange light many a golden peak, many a skirt of pine forest ; whilst he left dark and cool the narrow valleys, and did not melt a breath of the blue mists that wandered above the silent lake. With calm delight, Mr. Osborne stood and gazed from the balcony of his sitting-room. The sound of an opening door made him look round. It was Jean bringing in his breakfast.

"You will not forget, Jean!" whispered a soft, light voice in the passage.

Mr. Osborne smiled : his little hostess had been busy again. The breakfast was good, though plain. Mr. Osborne poured out his coffee.

"If Monsieur wishes to breakfast *à la fourchette* later," observed Jean, raising his voice so that his words could be heard outside through the half-open door, "he will have the goodness to say so. There is still some wine in the cellar," hesitatingly added Jean.

"I never take but two meals a day," answered Mr. Osborne.

"As Monsieur pleases."

"You may go."

Jean left.

"Poor little thing!" thought Mr. Osborne, "she would actually have given me another bottle of her wine."

His frugal meal was nearly over, when the sound of voices shrilly screaming made him walk across the room to a window that overlooked the court.

A slim, sunburnt pedlar, with yellow moustache, jaunty cap, and blue blouse, was spreading his wares on the stone steps of the porch, and he was holding with Jeannette one of those shrill, bargaining discussions to which the rapidity of speech, the impressive earnestness of gesture, and the vehement manner of the actors, give a dramatic character in the south, which in the north degenerates into coarseness and vulgarity.

"That—that—for twenty-five sous!" said the pedlar, flourishing aloft a red and yellow handkerchief, "have you no conscience?"

"Plenty!" stoutly said Jeannette.

"And you want it for twenty-five sous?"

"Of course I do, Monsieur Pierre."

Monsieur Pierre turned up his eyes and stamped his feet, folding up the handkerchief the while, in order to put it away. Then suddenly seeming to alter his resolve, he thrust it in her hand, and with a melodramatic tone and gesture, he said, "Take it."

"To be sure I shall ; you are glad enough to give it, too."

Monsieur Pierre rolled his eyes and knit his brow ; then, as if by magic, he smoothed his aspect. He had perceived Adèle, who stood smiling in the half gloom of the passage, and courteously, as any knight of old, did Monsieur Pierre doff his cap.

" Good morning, Monsieur Pierre," said the young girl, " I am not going to buy, you know, I have no money. I am only going to look."

" And I would rather have the looks of a pretty young lady like you," chivalrously replied Monsieur Pierre, smoothing his yellow moustache, " than the money of others ; so look away, Mademoiselle."

Without heeding the compliment, Adèle availed herself of the permission. Mr. Osborne saw her kneel on the stone flags, and scan with a curious eye the rustic treasures of Monsieur Pierre. He watched her closely ; but though she surveyed admiringly the knives, scissors, thimbles, handkerchiefs of every hue, and scarfs and shawls to match that lay before her, no lurking desire to possess any of them seemed to blend with her admiration. Her freely-expressed enthusiasm flattered the pedlar, who looked on graciously.

" Monsieur Pierre," continued Adèle, " I am not going to buy, but I should like to know the price of a few things. What may this blue scarf cost?"

" Ah ! that blue scarf," began Monsieur Pierre, smiling happily ; " that lovely blue scarf?"

" I would not give the five sous in the Wandering

Jew's purse for it," cried Jeannette, "trashy thing! I hope Mademoiselle does not dream of wasting her money upon it."

"Money!" exclaimed Adèle, laughing gaily, "why, you know I have no money."

"Mademoiselle will give you handsomer things any day," cried Jeannette, endeavouring, by the loudness of her voice, to drown the imprudent confession.

"Cousine never gives me anything," impatiently said Adèle, who detested lies of any sort.

"She will bring you a handsome silk dress from Lyons," persisted Jeannette.

"Will she!" ironically observed Monsieur Pierre, who knew how much chance Adèle had of a silk dress. "Well, ladies, good morning; I wish you joy of all the handsome things the other lady will bring you from Lyons."

He had been gathering his wares, he now shouldered his pack, and with a familiar and ironical nod he took his leave.

"Insolent little jackanapes!" indignantly muttered Jeannette.

Adèle laughed gaily.

"As if I cared a pin for anything he has got in his pack," she said.

She spoke in a tone of perfect sincerity, and spoke as she felt: a careless indifference to all that youth most covets, characterized her. She seemed unable to fill the past with regrets or the future with wishes. She took the present as it was, and rejoiced in it like a bird in sunshine, caring as little for the day

that is gone, as for the day that is yet to come ; a state of mind that ever provoked and perplexed Jeannette. "There is no making out that girl," she muttered going away.

Adèle sat down on the last of the stone steps where the wares of Monsieur Pierre had been displayed, and unconscious of the vicinity and observation of Mr. Osborne, she took her work from her pocket and began to sew. She sat in the cool morning shadow of the court, enclosed with the grim stone of ages, but a golden sunbeam stole down the old wall, lit up a tuft of grass, and came down with a warm glow on her brown head, and played with changing light on her clear cheek. Her downcast eyes, the serious grace of her childish features, her naïve attitude, the pure colouring of her young face, and the stern background of grey stone, and solemn gloom of the place, made a fresh and charming picture, on which Mr. Osborne's artist eye rested with vague pleasure.

"Mademoiselle has dropped this," said Jean, coming out from beneath the porch.

He stood before her, swaying his awkward body to and fro, and turning round a small morocco case, which he at length handed to her.

"It is not mine," she began. She said no more, but uttered a cry of wonder and admiration. Her nimble fingers had touched some secret spring, the case had flown open, and the young girl was dazzled by the sight of a gold thimble, bodkin, and needle-case, exquisitely worked, and enclosed in a second case of ivory.

"The very handle of the scissors is of gold," she cried; "oh, how beautiful!"

At once she put the thimble on her finger, and holding it up, she surveyed it admiringly.

"Look, Jeannette," she cried to the old woman, who now made her appearance; "look, did you ever see anything so beautiful? I did not think there was anything like it out of a fairy tale."

"Ah, bah!" said Jeannette, shrivelling up her nose, "what is it to the wheel of Madame la Marquise de Courcelles, your great grandmother, all inlaid with gold?"

"Well, but I have not seen the wheel of my great grandmother, and I have seen this. It must be Pierre who dropped it; run after him, Jean,—run!"

She hastily took off the thimble from her finger, and replacing it in the case, she put the case in his hands with another quick and imperative injunction to run after the pedlar. Jean vanished, for to hear was to obey.

"Ah, how beautiful!" cried Adèle, clasping her hands.

"Ah, bah!" said Jeannette, "a thing that would fit in the hollow of my hand. Ah! if it were a large rolling wheel!"

"And I tell you," said Adèle, looking very much provoked, "that the wheel of my great grandmother was nothing to it."

Jeannette drew herself up stiffly.

"There never was anything like the wheel of Madame la Marquise, Adèle de Courcelles," she

said; "it was presented to her by his Majesty Louis XV., the beloved."

"I do not care about kings," democratically said Adèle.

"Nor about a gold thimble either," replied Jeannette; "you care about nothing, Mademoiselle: your old silver thimble, your steel bodkin, your worn-out scissors, please you just as well."

"No, they do not," shortly said Adèle; "I would give anything for a beautiful thing like that. I should work twice as well with it."

"Ah!" said Jeannette, turning up her eyes with doleful triumph, "if the old place were only what it was; if the old family——"

"Oh, how tiresome you are to-day!" interrupted Adèle; "I like the old place as it is; and as I am the old family now, and am pleased with my lot, what need you care?"

No doubt Jeannette could have given this speech its answer, but Adèle had darted away across the court, beneath the arched doorway, into the garden, before Jeannette had time to open her mouth.

"She is very up and down to-day," thought Jeannette, "very." She paused, even in her thoughts; she saw Mr. Osborne standing in his window. His look was fixed on the porch beneath which Adèle had vanished, and there was a thoughtful smile on his handsome face, that brought a frown to Jeannette's brow. She did not like it. Suddenly he looked round, left the window, and crossed the room; presently she heard his voice conversing with some person within. Comforting herself with the nice

distinction that she was hearing and not listening, Jeannette heard him saying impatiently—

“I tell you I want it to-day.”

To which a voice which Jeannette recognised as that of Monsieur Pierre, submissively replied—

“But I have had the honour of explaining to Monsieur that this is to show; that I will procure him—”

“I will have this or none: name your price.”

The reply of Monsieur Pierre was inaudible, but Jeannette distinctly heard the chinking of money. “What can he have been buying?” thought Jeannette. Presently she heard the door of Mr. Osborne’s room close, and Monsieur Pierre appeared in the passage with a twinkle in his eye and a happy smile on his lip.

“May I trouble you for the little morocco case I left?” he asked, with a good-humoured nod.

“I dare say Jean is up-stairs,” drily said Jeannette.

Whistling as he went, Monsieur Pierre went up the staircase. Jeannette was assiduously dusting the bannisters when he returned. He touched his cap to her, and walked to the front door; then suddenly striking his forehead, like one who remembers a thing he has forgotten, he stepped back to Mr. Osborne’s door, knocked, and was admitted. In two minutes he reappeared. With another touch of his cap to Jeannette, he was going to leave the house, when, going up to him, she observed with unusual friendliness,—

“Did you find what you had lost?”

"Left, not lost," he civilly replied. "Yes, Mademoiselle Jeannette, I found it. Good morning!"

"What a hurry you are in. Let me see it again."

"Impossible! I gave my word of honour not to show it."

"But I have already seen it," sharply said Jeannette.

"But I did not show it; so honour is safe," replied Monsieur Pierre, smiling. "Good morning, Mademoiselle." With his politest bow, he vanished.

"As if I believed a word of that," indignantly muttered Jeannette.

At once her resolve was taken. She went and knocked at Mr. Osborne's door, and looking in, coolly asked "If Monsieur had rung?"

"No; but come in all the same."

Jeannette entered. She saw a heap of five-franc pieces on the table, but nothing like a morocco case. Mr. Osborne took four pieces of silver, and putting them in Jeannette's hand, he simply said,—

"I breakfast at eight, and I dine at six."

And having thus virtually constituted her cook and housekeeper, and empowered her to rule that inner realm of every household—the kitchen—he left the room.

"With all that money on the table," thought Jeannette, "his father would not have done that."

And her thoughts were taking a turn decidedly favourable to her new master, when she saw him cross the court and enter the garden.

"Well, what is he going there for?" half indig-

nantly thought Jeannette. "Ah! it will not end well."

Mr. Osborne had certainly not gone to his own garden, to see Adèle; yet it so happened that he had not walked ten steps before, turning the corner of an alley, the young girl stood before him, waiting, with a mien half shy and half daring, for him to pass.

She was fresh as a wild rose still bathed in morning dew; and as she bent her head to Mr. Osborne, with grave courtesy, he could not help smiling. She gave him a sense of quick living freshness, like a breeze from the mountain—like a shower of spring rain sparkling on the grass.

"Good morning!" she said, gravely.

"Good morning!" he replied, amused at her quaint manner.

"Did you sleep well?" she pursued.

Mr. Osborne bit his lip, but gave a reply both courteous and satisfactory.

With unmoved gravity Adèle continued, "I ask, because, when I came to Courcelles, I could not sleep at all. But that was a long time ago; I was only a little girl then." Without giving him time to make any remark, she observed, as she half turned away,—

"You had a bad breakfast this morning; but Cousine will see to your dinner."

"Mademoiselle de Janson is gone," said Mr. Osborne.

Adèle looked slightly surprised, and pensively leaned her cheek on her hand; but she was too

much accustomed to be nothing to Mademoiselle de Janson, to say more than —

“Ah, I would have bid her goodbye if I had known it.”

“I am going to Lyons soon,” said Mr. Osborne; “I shall be very happy to be the bearer of any letter or message for Mademoiselle de Janson with which you may choose to entrust me.”

She smiled, surprised, in his face. She was unused to courtesies; she was astonished at the idea of writing to her cousin.

“You are very kind,” she said, “but Mademoiselle de Janson would not like it.”

“But I may say that I left you in good health.”

“Say nothing about me,” seriously replied Adèle; “Cousine does not like to hear about me at all. I am a nuisance to her—poor Cousine,” she added, explanatorily.

But she said it with a smile. She might be a nuisance, but she certainly did not break her heart about it.

“Truly, God is good to the forsaken,” thought Mr. Osborne, “He gives them a light heart.”

Wild as her education was, Adèle had innate French politeness. She thought herself bound to keep up the conversation.

“Do you like Courcelles?” she asked, as if he were not the master of Courcelles.

“Very much indeed. Do you?”

“Oh, yes; I was reared here, you know.”

“And so was I,” he echoed, turning round, with a smile and a sigh, to look at the old Manor.

Courcelles was not a beautiful building. It had been edified in the ages of strength, and it still rose a fortress as well as a dwelling. Broad, high, massive, solid stone, from basement to roof, with turrets at its angles, and no ornaments in its façades, save a few arched windows, it yet commanded attention. Its size made it look imposing; the eye could not rest without some wonder on such a heap of stone, piled to shelter one family; its hue, of a tawny white, which in the morning sun looked red, was warm and mellow. Flights of steps led from the garden to the ground-floor apartments. One, steeper than the rest, rose to the first floor, and ended in a pretty little gallery, with delicate pillars and graceful arches, which Mr. Osborne admired aloud. Adèle did not answer. He looked; she was gone; and M. Morel stood before his master in obsequious attitude. The handsome and elegant Mr. Osborne scanned the low brow, the sly Tartar eyes, the flattened nose, and broad unmeaning mouth, of the foreman, as he stood before him, hat in hand, with a repulsion he could not conquer. A cold bend of the head was all the acknowledgment M. Morel's humble obeisance obtained.

"I have taken the liberty of intruding on Monsieur," said the foreman, in the soft voice which had already irritated and annoyed his fastidious master, "according, however, to the permission which I received last night from Monsieur, and, indeed, I thought Monsieur would like to know that a large order from Lyons came this morning, and that it is necessary a reply should be returned as early as

possible. I hope Monsieur will have the goodness to excuse me."

"There is no need," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne. "You did quite right. From whom is the order?"

"From Dubois et Cie. I have brought Monsieur the letter, which, owing to the absence of Monsieur, was directed to me. I dare say Monsieur is aware, that, owing to the trust and confidence which his late honoured father reposed in me, I was authorized to receive and execute orders for Osborne et Cie."

"Yes, I know," replied Mr. Osborne looking up from the letter which he hastily perused, "I remember it. These Dubois ask for credit. Are they safe?"

"They have always had credit from Osborne et Cie. But perhaps Monsieur would not mind coming over to the counting house and looking at the books."

"Very well," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne, whom the word "books" unpleasantly reminded, that, spite smiling sky, mountain and lake, he was in the fangs of business; "but first of all, Monsieur Dubois, tell me this——"

"Monsieur commits a slight mistake; François Morel to serve him, is my name."

"Well then, Monsieur Morel, can you tell me how my father spent some money on the Manor of Courcelles, and how I find it as it is, a ruin?"

"That money must have been spent a long time ago," placidly replied M. Morel.

"Why so?" sharply asked Mr. Osborne.

"Or it must have been whilst I was in Lyons," continued the foreman; "though if Monsieur will permit me to express an opinion on the subject, I should say, that, considering the state in which the Manor is now, it has never been repaired at all."

Mr. Osborne looked at M. Morel very fixedly, but the look did not for a moment discompose a face as placid and as yellow as a sheet of parchment. Still the foreman stood there, hat in hand, waiting the leisure of his master.

Such coolness is always irritating, and it was with secret impatience that Mr. Osborne intimated to M. Morel his readiness to follow him to the counting-house. With impassible mien the foreman acted as guide, and led his master through the quiet garden and past the noisy forge to the place of business.

Letters, books, and accounts, were quickly spread before Mr. Osborne. He did not labour under the disadvantages usually incidental to the poetical temperament. His mind was clear and firm, and fully equal to any sort of business. He simply hated it. Nature had wholly denied him that love for making money which great commercial nations are fond of calling energy, and which, in persevering obstinacy, almost equals that noble characteristic of the human mind.

With great clearness and rapidity Mr. Osborne grasped the present state of affairs in the firm of Osborne et Cie. He found it in France much the same as in England, safe as yet, but involved in many and perplexing speculations. Every answer

he received from Monsieur Morel, and that worthy individual might have been called the Dictionary of Osborne et Cie., so clear and laconic were his replies, confirmed Mr. Osborne in this view. Not that M. Morel in any way implied that such too was his opinion; to no opinion of any sort did he give utterance or pledge himself. His business was to know all and tell what he knew, and beyond this he did not go.

But this he did admirably, as Mr. Osborne could not but acknowledge internally. If he wished for a paper, an account, a reference, he had but to speak. As exact and almost as prompt as the geni slave of the lamp in the Eastern story, Morel noiselessly did his master's bidding, spoke not unless when questioned, nor looked without motive.

This model of a foreman showed anxiety but on one subject: to be relieved from the heavy responsibility that had rested on him during the last four weeks, and to obtain, as far as circumstances allowed, Mr. Osborne's opinion of the course he had held. He begged being excused for showing himself rather importunate on that head, but Monsieur would, he was sure, understand how desirous he felt to be relieved from this weight of cares, and to know how far it had been his good fortune to obtain the approbation of Monsieur.

Mr. Osborne had no motive for refusing to comply with this natural request. He did so at once, and the result of the examination was a quiet but handsome compliment paid by the master of Courcelles to his foreman, and acknowledged by the latter with

a short little bow. Mr. Osborne now rose to leave, but M. Morel placing a new packet of letters and papers before him, gently supposed that before going Monsieur would like to look at these. William Osborne resumed his seat without showing any impatience, and leaving him thus engaged, the foreman went back to his own desk, where he was soon busy writing.

The papers over which Mr. Osborne now glanced, related to certain complications of the business not quite so easy to master or to understand, as the simpler matters which Morel had, until then, laid before his master. But of all men, Mr. Osborne was the last to relish or to submit to being in the power of a dependant ; and as he entertained, moreover, a strong suspicion that M. Morel had kept back these papers for the end, in order to perplex him and compel him to do something more than put brief questions, Mr. Osborne had the pride or the weakness, whichever it was, to resolve on conquering alone. He therefore quietly allowed M. Morel to remain at his desk ; nay, more, certain matters which he had thought to leave for the morrow, he decided on despatching off at once. Thus he remained engaged until dusk, when the foreman observed meekly :

“Jean wishes to know if Monsieur is going in to dinner.”

Mr. Osborne turned round and saw the withered old servant standing at the door, and waiting for a reply.

“Send me in some dinner here,” he said ; and, without noticing the indignant amazement of Jean,

nor even the slight raising of the eyebrow in which M. Morel indulged, he at once returned to his occupation.

Jean went away grumbling. A whole day had he spent with Jeannette in preparing that despised dinner ; they had had a serious quarrel concerning a certain sauce ; and they had been mercilessly teased by the presence and interference of Adèle. And that was the end of it : a corner of the counting-house table. The anger and indignation of Jean increased at the close of this unlucky meal, half of which Mr. Osborne had not deigned to touch.

"You are but an ill-licked bear for all your fair looks," growled Jean, as he retired a second time, leaving Mr. Osborne deep in his papers.

At eight, M. Morel looked up from his desk, and meekly inquired if Monsieur required his services ; he received a quiet denial ; upon which he leisurely rose, took off his black linen sleeves, folded them neatly, carefully put them away, left not a stray paper to disgrace the propriety of his desk, and finally, having comprised the whole room in a glance, and ascertained that it needed him not, he left with an humble—

"I have the honour to bid Monsieur good-night."

To which, without raising his eyes from his desk, Mr. Osborne replied, with a quiet "Good-night, Monsieur Morel."

For several hours he worked on alone ; then, worn and wearied, he pushed away his papers, and rising, slowly walked up and down the counting-house.

What had he seen or read there, that clouded his

brow? He had seen that the most secure stand on the verge of peril; he had read that speculation had been carried to folly and excess; and he saw and guessed how hard was the task which lay before him, how much harder than it had first seemed.

Again he sat down and leaned his brow upon his hand; lone was the spot, silent was the night; the noise of the forge long had ceased; the workmen were at rest; the envied master could scarcely snatch a few moments of repose. Oh! how he regretted his quiet artist life of lonely wandering! Somewhat drearily he looked around him.

The lamp burned dim in the dark counting-house. Without, the rushing of a brook was faintly heard. Twelve struck from the belfry of the little church beyond the lake, and every stroke sounded distinct and clear. What brought the troubles and the cares of the world to this peaceful mountain solitude?

Suddenly the wind rose; with a wild moan it swept far away among the hills. The sound brought back a storm-vexed sea, a wrecking ship, and a terror-struck crew, of whom Mr. Osborne had once been one; and as the picture rose before him distinct and clear as reality, he exclaimed with a half-sigh:

“Oh! Danger, where art thou not?”

CHAPTER VII.

RESTLESSNESS.

"JEANNETTE."

"Mamzelle!"

"I think it will never be six o'clock."

Jeannette did not reply; but she paused in her spinning, and looked extremely grave.

She sat in the same spot where Adèle had found her the day before, and where she had given Monsieur Morel his answer. But Adèle, instead of sitting on the stone step opposite her old friend, hearing her dreaming reminiscences of the past without heeding them, stood by her side, restless and impatient, looking at the sky, and wondering why the sun lingered so long there, and did not set. These signs, besides the exclamation we have recorded, were noted and internally commented upon by Jeannette, who drew her own conclusions, and, as she said herself, knew or rather did not know, what to think.

This had been a trying day—a day of uneasiness. It might have been pleasant to the culinary feelings of Jeannette to prepare once more a dainty

meal, of savoury dishes ; it might, if Jean had not helped and Mademoiselle Adèle meddled. With one she quarrelled about a sauce ; with the other she had a warm discussion about a certain cream, which *bon gre malgré* Jeannette had to make. This settled, Adèle amused herself with the task of preparing the Hall for its master, whom she persisted in treating as a guest. She altered the place of every chair, settled the table, smoothed the cloth, gathered with her own hands a plate of the best and ripest fruit which the orchard yielded ; and this task over, she returned to the garden, where she found Jeannette spinning in the sun, as calmly as if the dinner were not cooking alone in the kitchen. Adèle could not check a remonstancé.

“It is all right,” drily answered Jeannette.

A brief silence followed ; and at length Adèle, in her impatience, gave utterance to the remark with which this chapter opened, and announced it as her deliberate opinion that it would never be six o'clock.

Jeannette looked grave, for she forgot that Adèle was sixteen, and led a dull life, to which every incident must be an event. Then casting a glance at the mingled sunshine and shadow that gave light and gloom on the walls of the old manor, and indignantly declaring that it was not six, but seven, she despatched Jean, who had approached in the meanwhile, to the counting-house. Jean went, and returned with the information that Mr. Osborne would dine in the counting-house. Adèle looked blank ; Jeannette turned scarlet, and folded her arms.

"I wash my hands of him," she said; "not another dinner of my cooking shall he eat."

"Jeannette!" cried Adèle.

"Let him cook himself!" pursued Jeannette. The aristocratic blood of eleven centuries rose to the young girl's brow. With a quiet gesture of her little hand, she said, "Please never to speak so again."

But Jeannette, unaccustomed to obey any save Mademoiselle de Janson, now looked so rebellious, and Adèle was so haughtily resolute, that Jean hastened to observe, in a conciliatory tone—

"There is a way of settling all that; for Louise asked me this morning if any one was wanted."

Here he paused abruptly, aghast at the blunder he had committed. Louise was a spinster of Jeannette's own age; they had had a quarrel at fifteen, about precedence in a country ball; and this mortal wound had never been rightly healed. Rivalry of another kind, but unconfessed, had embittered it. Jean had flirted with Louise some twenty years before, and Jeannette had never forgotten the affront. Most unlucky, therefore, was the suggestion he now made of introducing, in a fashion highly offensive to Jeannette's pride, this ancient enemy.

In a voice tremulous with anger, Jeannette supposed that it would indeed be very satisfactory to the feelings of Monsieur Jean to bring Mademoiselle Louise into the house, but she regretted to inform him that her duty to Monsieur Osborne would not allow her to consent to the proposed measure. She could not conscientiously allow a person of Made-

moiselle Louise's character to enter the Manor of Courcelles, and plunder an unfortunate stranger.

"I am sorry for it," she continued, with cutting sarcasm, "for of course, it would have been pleasant to you, Monsieur Jean, and I should like to oblige an old fellow-servant; but I cannot, Monsieur Jean, I cannot." And the wheel went round with dazzling rapidity.

Jean looked extremely piteous, and vainly cast imploring glances at the obdurate Jeannette. Adèle, feeling that she would be unable to repress a tendency to laugh, and not wishing to yield to it, silently left them, and went down the garden.

She went to the orchard. The golden light of sunset filled it to overflowing; the birds sang sweetly; soft clouds floated with airy grace in the blue heights of the sky; Adèle watched them till they vanished one by one; and in watching them, she forgot how provoking it was of Mr. Osborne not to have come in to dinner.

Sweet to childhood and to youth is the companionship of their own thoughts, and never had Adèle felt more charmed with her own fancies than on this evening. She lingered in the orchard until the stars came out in the sky, filling it fast, until the dew fell on sleeping grass and flowers, and until Jeannette, uneasy at her long absence, came out to look for her young mistress.

"What do you want, Jeannette?" a little impatiently asked Adèle.

"Holy Virgin, Mamzelle! you do not want to sleep in the orchard to-night?"

"I do not want to sleep anywhere," was the cool reply of Adèle. "Why should I stifle myself up in a close little room?"

"Well, well, it is scarcely a room for a lady of the house of Courcelles," replied Jeannette, folding her arms, and speaking dolefully—and we may as well remark that to be doleful had become the chief enjoyment of her life—"I remember the time when I would scarcely have slept in such a room myself. But everything changes in this world; the world changes, and we change along with it. You would not think so, Mamzelle Adèle, but I was once reckoned a pretty girl; and it was only to-day, just after you left us, that Jean, silly old fellow, reminded me how, walking behind two gentlemen of these parts, the Chevalier d'Auxern and the Vicomte de Loyes, he heard them talking about the pretty black-eyed girl of Courcelles. Ah, well! where is the use of thinking of that now? The world goes round like a spinning-wheel, and cunning are they who can make it stop. Vicomte and chevalier are now but a little heap of dust, and Jeannette will soon be like them."

Here Jeannette, whose eyes had been bent on the earth, raised them with a sigh, and found that she was alone.

Whilst she spoke, Adèle looked on the darkening night, and was seized with an irresistible longing to breathe the cool air—to run unchecked along the silent and lonely alleys seemed the very desire of her heart—a sweet and stolen pleasure. "If I stay here," she thought, "Jeannette will tease me to go

in." Unheard, she stole away a few steps; then, light as a lapwing, and joyous as a bird escaped from its cage, she ran along the first garden path.

Sweet, indeed, must be liberty, when its image, a moment's release, can be so sweet. The night was dark, but Adèle knew no fear; and though the moon hid beneath dark clouds, and shone with watery gleam on the decaying statues, she went on, happy in the very sense of the solitude and desolation that reigned around her; nor did she stop until she reached the limits of the garden most remote from the Manor. A wall and a door had once guarded it on this side, but the door was shattered, and a deep gap yawned in the ivied wall close by. The forge was silent, though the stream rushed down from the mountain with the voice of a torrent; the sounds of labour had long ceased; but a light shone like a star in the silent counting-house. Adèle stood still and watched it dreamily; scarcely a few yards divided her from the spot where that light burned. It shone full and clear on Mr. Osborne's grave face. Adèle sat down on the edge of the wall, and looked at him long and pensively. Why did he look so anxious? Why did he walk up and down with that restless step, or lean his brow upon his arm with that worn mien? Was it trouble that ailed him? She might put the question, for as yet that sad knowledge had not come to her. Her life was like her temper—a genial summer sky without a cloud.

She looked at him again. He now sat facing her; his look fixed on vacant space, seemed to seek and

meet hers ; and Adèle, forgetting that though she could see she could not be seen, returned it with friendliness. "Poor fellow !" she said, half aloud, half to her own thoughts, "what ails you? You are rich, and I am poor as Job ; yet I am always merry, and you look sad. You are shut up, with heavy books of figures, in that close room ; and I, free as air, run about your garden, on this beautiful night, with nothing but the stars to reckon. Do like me, and be gay as I am."

"Holy Virgin! Mamzelle Adèle, who are you talking to?" asked Jeannette, coming up, out of breath, behind her young mistress.

"Why, to myself, of course!" replied Adèle, without looking round,—for the habit of talking aloud was one which she had contracted in her solitude.

"And what are you doing here, Mamzelle?" asked Jeannette.

"Looking at Monsieur Osborne," said Adèle ; "one can see him quite well from here."

Jeannette was confounded, and knew not what to think.

There are few characters more perplexing than those of the perfectly sincere. Disguise of any sort was so distasteful to Adèle, that, right or wrong, she always said whatever she thought and did ; and, accordingly, Jeannette never could tell when her young mistress gave much or little weight to actions so freely confessed.

"If one could only make her out a bit," thought Jeannette. "Looking at him! Holy Virgin!—what can she want with looking at him?"

“And do you know, Jeannette, earnestly continued Adèle, far from divining the nature of the old woman’s thoughts, “do you know what I think of his face this morning? It is better than handsome, Jeannette; it looks noble and good. And now we will go in,” she added, lightly leaping down from the broken wall on which she had been sitting.

She went in, gaily talking all the way. Jeannette followed, moodily silent. As they reached the Manor, Adèle stood still, and looked back. The light in the counting-house was still burning.

“Poor fellow!” she thought, but not aloud; and still she stood and looked. There came to her a vague sense of the cares which haunted that lonely vigil, and with it a vague, daring wish to know what trouble and sorrow were like. Imprudent girl! to wish for the knowledge which Fate so rarely denies.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADEMOISELLE DE JANSON'S GIFT.

MR. OSBORNE went to Lyons, and he had been gone a week. Jeannette sat spinning in the garden by the light of the declining sun ; the walls of the Manor looked warm and brown in the yellow glow ; a soft breeze stirred the green plants that grew in every dark crevice ; swallows skimmed in the air with short shrill twitterings, and the wheel of Jeannette went on with a drowsy murmur. The tasks of Jean in house and garden were long over, yet, still armed with his eternal rake, he scraped the gravel up and down the path ; he plucked a weed and threw it away, then, finding nothing more to do, he leaned on his rake, and stared vacantly at Jeannette.

He was absorbed in the contemplation, and Jeannette was absorbed in her task ; neither spoke until a third person disturbed a silence which both enjoyed. M. Morel came up, with his slouching gait, and a sneer on his yellow face, that roused at once all the ire of Jeannette.

"Where is Mamzelle Adèle?" he asked, impudently.

Adèle was a sensitive subject with both the old servants. Jean swayed his long body to and fro, and looked ireful; Jeannette gave her wheel a jerk, and said, indignantly,—

"Mamzelle Adèle is well where she is, and you are well where you are, Monsieur Morel."

M. Morel shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! bah!" he said, "I do not want her—not I. But a promise is a promise; and as I promised her to-day, that as soon as I knew Monsieur was coming back, I should let her know, I came to tell her that he will be here this evening. You may tell her or not, just as you please; but Mamzelle Adèle is pretty anxious about Monsieur Osborne's return, I can tell you; for she asked me yesterday, and before yesterday; and she came to me in the counting-house to-day to know if Monsieur Osborne was ever coming back. A pleasant evening to you, Monsieur Jean; you are more in the good graces of Mademoiselle Jeannette than I am."

And without waiting for observation or reply, he walked away. The two old servants exchanged looks of dismay.

"What can the little thing be thinking of?" groaned Jeannette; "and what will he think of it?"

"He looks a good gentleman," dubiously said Jean.

"Good or bad, what will he think? Ah, Monsieur Jean, that comes of letting young ladies of good family grow up like weeds in a garden,

instead of locking them up until their wedding-day; for, you see, they are proud and haughty, and high-bred, and they will have their way; and they have fancies, too, that never enter the heads of poor girls; therefore, I say, lock them up—cage them all.”

Jean gently demurred, and logically proved to Jeannette, that with a little watching, it was difficult that Adèle and Monsieur Osborne should meet often, and impossible that they should meet alone; and whilst he was proving it, that impossible event was taking place in another part of the garden.

Mr. Osborne reached Courcelles as the sun was near setting; he entered the counting-house for a few minutes, read the letters which he found there, and was duly informed by Monsieur Morel that the young lady had been very anxious for the return of Monsieur.

“What young lady?” coldly asked Mr. Osborne.

“Mademoiselle Adèle. She asked me three times when Monsieur was coming back.”

“Please to answer these letters at once,” said Mr. Osborne, leaving the counting-house.

“I knew he would,” muttered Monsieur Morel, as, looking after his patron, he saw him, instead of riding round to the Manor, enter the garden.

The evening was beautiful, and Mr. Osborne thought of nothing save its beauty. Slowly he walked on, enjoying the serene purity of eve, until he came to an old-fashioned maze, which, since his boyhood, he had loved, partly for its quaint beauty, and more, perhaps, for its solitude. On he went,

until he reached the central arbour; a warm and yellow light shone on the close boxwood hedge, and gilded the mutilated statue of Silence that stood in its verdant niche, with its stone finger lightly laid on its mute lips. On the step of the half-broken pedestal Adèle sat reading. Her head was bent, her eyes were fastened on the book in her lap, her hands were folded around her knees; her feet were crossed, her look and attitude expressed a mind absorbed.

Mr. Osborne stood for a while looking at her curiously; she was evidently unconscious of his presence, and wrapped in her book. He saw her cheek flush, her lip tremble, and finally her tears fall fast and free, like those of a child, on the page over which she bent.

"What can she be reading?" thought Mr. Osborne. At that moment Adèle raised her eyes and saw him. At once her face lit, and with a joyful start, she exclaimed:

"Oh, I am so glad!" and immediately she added, "I have been longing for you to come back!"

Mr. Osborne looked at her with slight wonder; but without giving him time to linger on the feeling, she said, ardently:

"Oh! do tell me all about it. What becomes of Octave, and is Marie dead or not?"

Mr. Osborne glanced at the book in her lap and recognized the first volume of a tale he had been reading, and which he had forgotten in the garden, where Adèle had probably found it. On thus learning the cause of her great anxiety for his return he

could not help looking down in the young girl's face with a quiet smile.

"I wish I could gratify you," he said, "but it is unfortunately not in my power. I do not know what became of Mark Antony."

"Octave, you mean," she interrupted.

"True. I am ignorant of his fate as well as of that of Marie. And as I have unfortunately left the second volume behind in Paris, I can give you no exact clue to their destiny."

Adèle looked blank.

"I thought you had taken it to Lyons," she said, "and that I should know everything when you came back; and instead of that, here I am as much perplexed as ever about the ending."

"Why not invent one then?" he suggested.

Adèle looked up surprised. He stood leaning against the pedestal at the foot of which she sat. We have already said that Mr. Osborne was handsome; but his countenance had other characteristics than those of mere beauty, it was grave and benignant: a calm face where unquietness and passion had never dwelt, or whence they had long since passed away. This serenity sometimes degenerated into coldness and even into seeming severity, but rarely when he spoke to a woman or a child, and Adèle had something of both. As he now looked down at her, the half smile of his lips seemed to her to shine from the very depth of his dark eyes.

"Invent an ending!" echoed Adèle.

"Why not?" he asked with a smile of which she felt the kindness, and not the irony. For his nature

like that of the poet, was double : imaginative and ironical. He was born disappointed, and had he been a poet in speech, as he was in feeling, he would have sung, not through the spirit of content, but with the voice of regret or desire. As it was, if he enjoyed the beautiful with the luxurious keenness which is the privilege of some minds, yet he had also the sad gift, to measure, with a pitiless eye, the shortcomings of men and things. Had he now spoken as he thought, it would have been to demolish the fair edifice which the young fancy of Adèle had so readily constructed ; to deride Octave, sneer at Marie, and having laid the senseless idols in the dust, to leave them there. But he did not ; he left the tale as it was, a wonderful tale ; and the hero and the heroine, perfect and beautiful, and still smiling. He said again :

“ Why care about the end ? Birds sing the same song since the days of Adam and Eve, and man tells the same tale to man, for ever and ever again. I hold that there is but one perfect woman, dark or fair, it matters not ; but one perfect man, strong yet gentle ; and, as a novel is the story of humanity, and as humanity is man and woman, it follows that there is no more than one eternal novel ; it may be told with a few changes, it matters not, it is still the same song.”

“ That may be,” replied Adèle, looking disappointed. “ But I wish I knew the real end for all that !”

Mr. Osborne did not insist, but, changing the subject, he observed :

"I had the pleasure of seeing Mademoiselle de Janson in Lyons. She was very glad to learn that I had left you in good health."

"Ah!" abstractedly said Adèle. "Was she well herself?" she asked, after a pause.

"Quite well."

Adèle asked no more questions; it was plain she expected nothing more.

"Your cousin requested me to give you this small parcel," pursued Mr. Osborne, producing a little packet as he spoke.

But Adèle did not hold out her hand to receive it; she looked not so much surprised as incredulous, and said briefly:

"That must be a mistake, sir. It cannot be for me!"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Osborne, looking amused.

"No, no; it cannot," persisted Adèle, with an obstinate shake of the head.

Mr. Osborne availed himself of the argument of Socrates, physical proof, and stooping, he quietly laid the packet in her lap. The scepticism of Adèle yielded to facts: her name was certainly written on the back of the parcel, in a hand like that of Mademoiselle de Janson. She broke the seal: wrapped in folds of tissue paper, she found a morocco case that drew from her an exclamation of surprise; for if not the same which she had seen a few days before, it was certainly very like it. She opened it at once, and within she found the case of ivory and all its golden treasures. For a while Adèle remained mute and

breathless with mingled surprise and joy, then she looked up at Mr. Osborne, her cheeks flushed with pleasure, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"How kind, how very kind of Cousine, is it not?" she said at length, in a broken voice; "and I, who thought she did not care about me! Oh! how naughty it was of me, was it not?"

Tears rushed to her eyes as she made the penitent confession, and deepened their azure already so deep.

"But is it for me! really for me!" she added after a brief pause.

"Really for you," he replied, smiling.

Adèle laughed with pleasure. She took out the thimble and tried it on; she drew forth the scissors and recklessly clipped her little black apron; with a real needle, extracted from its case of gold, she drew mimic stitches; then light and frolicsome as a child, and without troubling herself to bid Mr. Osborne adieu, she threw down the volume that told the fortunes of Octave and Marie, and starting up from the step of the pedestal, she ran off through the maze, calling out in a clear and ringing voice:

"Jeannette, Jeannette, come and see!"

"Poor little thing!" thought Mr. Osborne, smiling at her childish joy, and stretching himself down on the low step, warm with the heat of the declining sun, he gazed at the clear and serene vault above him, and soon forgot Adèle and her pleasure.

That he was the author of that pleasure, we need scarcely tell the reader. He had availed himself readily of the first opportunity he had found, of

gratifying one, who, when he came unknown and a stranger, had done her utmost to gratify him. Mr. Osborne had not forgotten her welcome on the evening of his arrival, nor a word of the brief conversation he had overheard between her and Jeannette. Hospitable had been her reception of the tired traveller; her little money had been spent to provide for his table, her little store of old wine had been opened to him. It pleased Mr. Osborne to return such kindness as it had been bestowed secretly. Nature had given him the art of persuasion; he found the way to persuade Mademoiselle de Janson to send his gift in her own name to her little god-daughter, and by passing his word that as it had been his first, so it should be his last, he prevailed.

Unconscious of the truth, Adèle gaily ran on until she found Jeannette still spinning, but alone, in her favourite place.

"Look at what Cousine sends me!" triumphantly cried Adèle, holding up her treasure.

Jeannette remained amazed and mute. Adèle laughed with glee.

"Monsieur Osborne brought it," she pursued.

"And what will Mademoiselle do with it?" drily asked Jeannette.

"Use it to be sure."

"It is too fine."

"Was my great grandmother's wheel too fine?"

"Ah, but those were the good old times."

"Oh, you are very tiresome!" said Adèle, looking provoked, "and very croaking. I say it was kind

of my dear godmother to send me that beautiful thing, and I shall write and thank her for it this very moment."

"Do, Mamzelle!" rather eagerly said Jeannette, "and I will post your letter myself."

"Well, then, if I write, it must be in the open air," said Adèle; "I cannot lock myself up in a close room on this beautiful evening."

"I shall go and fetch you everything you want," returned Jeannette, with unusual alacrity.

"Do, like a good soul," said Adèle; "I shall spin whilst you are away."

She sat down as Jeannette rose, and murmuring to herself an old ballad of the province, she spun as fast as her old friend, though perhaps not with as much skill. The sound of her own voice prevented her from hearing the step of Mr. Osborne on the gravel path behind her; and she did not see him until he sat down at the other end of the same bench with her. He did not speak, but looked at her with a kind smile, which Adèle returned freely. Nevertheless, his gaze bespoke such marked attention, that with her blunt frankness, she asked—

"Am I like any one you know?"

"Not exactly; but you remind me of my little girl."

The eyes of Adèle opened wide. "You have a little girl?" she said.

He assented, smiling.

"And a wife?"

"I am a widower;" but this time he did not smile.

"And how old is your little girl?"

"How old? really I have forgotten;—five—seven—I believe."

"Is she like you?"

"I am told she is."

The return of Jeannette with pen, ink, and paper, interrupted the discourse.

"The bench will do for a table," said Adèle, "and this stone for a seat."

To the stone Mr. Osborne silently added the travelling cloak which he held on his arm. Adèle thanked him, and smiled. He resumed his seat at the end of the bench. Jeannette removed her wheel to some distance, and watched with jealous attention.

Adèle soon laid down her pen, and said—

"Will your little girl ever come here?"

"It is not likely."

"What a pity! I should have so liked to see her. I cannot write," she added, after awhile, "the evening is too beautiful."

And she laid her head on the bench, and looked at the sky.

Jeannette muttered to herself, and shook her head. The look of Mr. Osborne was slowly scanning the façade of the Manor. Adèle followed his glance, and saw it resting on a dark and ancient square of the building.

"That was the prison," she said.

"The prison!" he echoed, surprised; "was there a prison here?"

"Ay! and they found bones in it at the revolu-

tion!" replied the young girl, carelessly; "perhaps that was why they guillotined all the De Courcelles."

"Are there none left?"

"Jeannette, are there any Courcelles left?" asked Adèle, looking over her shoulder at the old woman.

Jeannette's wheel paused, and she said, in measured accents—

"The De Courcelles were the greatest private family in all Burgundy, for they were descended from the Dukes, who, as every one knows, were of the royal blood of France itself. They were very proud, very insolent, and very cruel, for they were a great family. Mademoiselle de Janson is of the blood; but Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles is the last of the name."

With some surprise Mr. Osborne heard this strange and impartial family genealogist; then with a half-smile, he looked down on the slight and almost childish girl, the sole living representative of a proud and warlike race.

She still sat at the foot of the bench, with her elbow resting upon it, and her cheek in her hand. She, too, smiled as she met his gaze, for she guessed his thoughts.

"Yes," she said, with her gay frankness, "I am the last of their name; what matter?"

"You are not sorry?" said Mr. Osborne.

"Sorry!" echoed Adèle, "why should I be sorry? Let them be extinct; I say it is well. They were a fierce race in their day, fierce and terrible. Their power and their terror are gone; their Manor is an appendage to a forge; their daughter is a poor girl

who sleeps under their roof through the charity of a friend—'each in their turn,' says the proverb."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, how can you talk so?" indignantly groaned Jeannette.

"It is rank heresy!" said Mr. Osborne, smiling; "think of it, Mademoiselle Adèle, had Fortune's wheel but given one turn more or less, you might have been a princess."

"A princess!" here put in Jeannette, with the privileged liberty of a French servant, "a queen! Mademoiselle might have been a queen!"

"A queen! Mademoiselle Adèle, just think of it!" again said Mr. Osborne.

But Adèle only shook her gay head.

"I cannot bear a cap," she replied, "what should I do with a crown? Besides, queens cry more than they sing, 'tis said; and little Adèle de Courcelles, who runs about, and laughs, and sings, like a peasant-girl, is happier, I dare say, than Her Majesty, or her Royal Highness.

Mr. Osborne smiled at her careless philosophy; but old Jeannette shook her head, and muttered over her wheel:

"They were a wicked race; they feared neither God nor man, I grant it—but they were a great family for all that."

A long silence followed.

Mr. Osborne was vaguely enjoying the calm serenity of the hour; Adèle was wondering what his little girl was like, and Jeannette was meditating over the faded glories of the fallen race. The long dark figure of Jean emerging from the low door

facing them, and his slow funereal voice disturbed them all three.

"Monsieur is wanted," he said.

"Who wants me?" asked Mr. Osborne, a little impatiently.

"Madame Osborne, Mesdemoiselles Osborne, who are just arrived," was the phlegmatic reply.

Mr. Osborne rose at once, and with a farewell smile to Adèle, left the gardens. Adèle pouted, and looked provoked.

"I wish they had not come," she said, a little impatiently. "I was just getting acquainted with Monsieur Osborne, and I like him very much."

"And I am very glad they are come," observed Jeannette, pursing up her lips.

"Why so?" shortly asked Adèle.

"I am very glad they are come," persisted the old woman, walking away with her wheel.

"Jeannette is very tiresome to-day," said Adèle ; "what ails her, Jean?"

Jean shook his head.

"She was always an odd girl," he said ; "very odd, Mamzelle Adèle, no one could make her out."

"Let her be as odd as she likes," gaily said Adèle ; "I have something better than my great-grandmother's wheel. Look, Jean."

She showed him triumphantly the morocco case ; but Jean was not enthusiastic.

"Every one is tiresome to-day !" exclaimed Adèle, "every one, excepting Monsieur Osborne, who brings me delightful things from Lyons, and who

is the handsomest and most charming man I have ever seen."

"Ah! if Mademoiselle Jeannette heard that," thought Jean, shaking his head ominously.

CHAPTER IX.

DOMESTIC.

MRS. OSBORNE had come. She had come with her two daughters; with her eldest son, Capitaine Joseph, whom Mr. Osborne did not like, and had not invited, and with seven servants on whom he had not counted. Noise, confusion, soon filled the whole house. To complete Mr. Osborne's annoyance, a visitor, the Baron de Launay, dropped in, spent the evening with the ladies, and flirted with Isabella. With nervous horror, Mr. Osborne divined in him a future adorer; and as M. de Launay was his neighbour and commercial ally, there would be no keeping him away from the devoted dwelling. He was six feet high, a dandy from his wavy, fair hair to the tip of his boot; he had languid blue eyes, a rolling way of speaking, a blonde moustache, and a plump white hand; he affected English speech, English ways, and called Mr. Osborne, "My dear;" yet, spite these advantages, and spite, too, some talent, for Monsieur de Launay was not exactly a fool, he horrified William Osborne, who knew no relief until

the family party broke up, and he could retire to his own rooms and to what he prized scarcely less than their solitude ; their silence—for silence to him was dear as a friend, and sweet as sleep. Rude sounds, many voices, jarred on his nerves, and gave him a sense of pain.

Not without a purpose did he rise early the next morning and go down to the garden. The fragrance of the night still lingered on the air, the bright gem-like dew still sparkled on the gravelled path and on the leafy hedge ; but vainly had Mr. Osborne hoped for solitude. Scarcely had he walked ten steps, when a fair hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned round and saw his blooming sister Isabella. They exchanged a friendly good morning. Isabella was handsome and truthful, qualities which her brother was prompt to recognise and appreciate. He was handsome and a gentleman, and Isabella liked beauty in men, and could feel the charm of good manners.

“ How do you like the Baron ? ” she asked.

“ Not at all—insufferable coxcomb ! ”

Isabella withdrew her hand from his shoulder, and broke off a twig from the hedge.

“ By-the-way,” she said, sharply, “ what have you been saying to Anna about a young girl who does nice needlework ? ”

“ What a ridiculous mistake,” said Mr. Osborne, impatiently ; “ Anna complained of the want of society, and I mentioned to her Mademoiselle de Courcelles.”

"Oh, is that foolish little thing still here?" interrupted Isabella.

Mr. Osborne had not time to reply; a short, square, and sallow man, with sallow hair and sallow moustache, clad in the military undress of a French officer, a cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets, was approaching them with a cavalier air.

"Already in business," said Captain Joseph, taking out his cigar to speak, and alluding to a letter which Mr. Osborne held. "Ah, what a pity you do not know chess! You know that I am carrying on a game by correspondence?"

"And I," said Mr. Osborne, "must attend to my correspondence, and bid you good morning."

"Pray make no apologies," said Captain Joseph, in an affable tone, that implied, "Go, my dear fellow, go; I know that if you could help it you would not tear yourself from my charming society;" and sitting down on a bench, he crossed his legs, returned his hands to his pockets, and half shutting his eyes, he smoked lazily in the morning sun. Mr. Osborne gave him an ironical look, and was turning away, when Captain Joseph suddenly exclaimed—

"By-the-way, who is that little thing who sings like a lark?—She awoke me this morning,—she actually did; and I looked out and saw her skipping in the dew like a rabbit. She is very little,—quite a bird,—and do you know she is very pretty,—positively she is," he added, impressively.

Mr. Osborne stopped short and looked so vexed, that Isabella, who was rude as well as true, burst

out laughing ; but when this merry mood was over, she turned to Mr. Osborne and said in English—

“Pray waste no wrath on him ; he is obtuse,—leave the offender to me.”

So saying, she passed her arm within that of Capitaine Joseph, and with a sisterly despotism to which he good-humouredly submitted, she led him away.

But brief was the respite Mr. Osborne thus enjoyed. Scarcely had he walked ten steps, muttering something about insolence, when he heard Anna in the neighbouring maze querulously scolding her French maid.

“How stupid and how selfish you must be,” said Anna ; “I told you to tell my brother, Monsieur Osborne, that I wanted to speak to him. Why did you bring me in this horrid cold garden ?”

Mr. Osborne did not wait to hear the maid’s reply, but hastily made his escape whilst still unseen. With a sigh he remembered the peace and solitude of the old garden on the preceding evening, and the little reader at the foot of the broken statue of Silence. Quietness and harmony seemed to have left his home. “They will scarcely follow me to the counting-house,” he thought, as he proceeded to the place which from a prison seemed likely to become a refuge.

M. Morel was already bending over his desk ; he raised his eyes on hearing his patron enter, and bowed with his whole body, then resumed his writing.

Mr. Osborne sank down on his chair, and leaned

his brow on his hand with an aspect of weariness and ennui, that did not escape the foreman.

"Monsieur does not seem well this morning," he observed.

"Oh, I am well enough," was the careless reply. "What news?"

"Bad news, for it is doubtful, and good news shines like the sun at noonday."

"But the sun does not shine every day at noon, Monsieur Morel, and therefore your comparison does not hold good."

M. Morel smiled, and still writing, replied, "Monsieur is always in the right."

"But what is this news?" resumed Mr. Osborne, after a slight pause.

"The news is, that Dubois et Cie. have not yet stopped payment, but that they may do so to-day or to-morrow, especially if Monsieur like. But I have put all the papers on Monsieur's desk."

Mr. Osborne took up the packet of papers, glanced over them, dropped them from his hand, and leaning back in his chair, he folded his arms and bent his head in an attitude of mingled thought and sadness.

With him now lay the fate of a great commercial house half a century old. If he proved pitiless, if for the chance of his right he pressed his claim, it was almost certain that the house must fall; and if he proved clement, if he spared the struggling and the weak, might he not lose?

"He cannot make up his mind," thought Monsieur Morel, stealthily watching his master; but Mr. Osborne unluckily caught his eye and returned the

look with one of such grave sternness, that it brought a faint glow of colour to his sallow cheek.

"Monsieur has no orders to give me?" he observed.

"None," was the laconic reply.

"Oh, dear! what a most inopportune moment I have chosen," said a soft voice at the door.

Mr. Osborne looked round with mingled surprise and displeasure, for he had recognised the tones of his stepmother. But she met his look with a smile of undisturbed complacency.

"Ah! how many recollections this place recalls!" said she, sinking down on the chair her stepson silently handed her; "the time when I shared the cares of business with my first husband seems to return."

She sighed; Mr. Osborne remained silent. Mrs. Osborne resumed.

"Well, I am a great bore to come here, am I not? but I feel anxious. Business has its diplomacy, as you know better than I do."

With a smile he disclaimed the compliment.

"Oh, yes, you do; but to come to the point, what families shall we visit and receive?—The Mazois, the De Launays, the Jolys?"

"Pray see whomsoever you please," he courteously replied; "I have nothing to do with it."

"My dear William, the diplomacy of business requires a selection. If you will hint to me to whom am to pay more or less attention, whom I am to drop or to cultivate, I think I can render you good service."

But Mr. Osborne was not to be moved from his indifference.

"I am not a diplomatic man," he said, smiling ;
"I should commit some sad blunder. I leave all to your tact and good breeding."

The plain English of which was, that Mrs. Osborne was to know and be nothing. The spider whom Bruce watched in the peasant's hut was no unfair prototype of Mrs. Osborne. You could break her web, you could not discourage her. She rose as if to retire, then turned back, coughed, and said, with a touch of embarrassment—

"I am going to tread on delicate ground. But frankness is best ; shall I call on Madame Lascours ?"

"Why not ?"

"My dear William, all the world knows why."

"Why should I object to meet Madame Lascours ?" he asked, gravely. "She is not, so far as I can remember, a lady to be shunned, and her husband is one of the most honourable men of business in the province."

"Then I may ask them to dine with us next week ?" said Mrs. Osborne.

Mr. Osborne smiled and said :

"They are in Paris."

"Then I need trouble you no more," she observed, reddening slightly. He courteously saw her to the door. She retired beaten, but not conquered.

The diplomacy of business having left Mr. Osborne inaccessible, Mrs. Osborne, coolly and immediately took possession of the household and Manor

of Courcelles : Jean and Jeannette were at once dismissed and the new servants appointed to their duties ; in short, by the time Mr. Osborne appeared at dinner a *coup d'état* had taken place, and a revolution was all but accomplished. But some bird of the air had conveyed the tidings to the counting-house. Mr. Osborne was not surprised ; he smiled, he said a few words, and the tide of revolution rolled back : Jean and Jeannette were reinstalled and the only consequence of Mrs. Osborne's attempt was, that of her seven servants, four at once took their way to Paris. Mrs. Osborne thus practically learned that though her stepson might be passive and careless, he would not, however, allow her to be mayor of the palace.

That same evening, Jeannette was summoned to her master's room, and intrusted with a packet of books for her young mistress, with Mr. Osborne's compliments.

"Mademoiselle is going away to-morrow morning," boldly said Jeannette.

"Take her the books nevertheless," he said smiling. Mr. Osborne could rarely be deceived, and he now read an untruth in Jeannette's brown eyes.

And, indeed, it was not Adèle who went away the next morning, but Mr. Osborne himself.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughters had something like ten days given them, wherein to recover from the ill humour into which the dismissal of the four servants had thrown them.

Mr. Osborne returned late one evening. He was passing by the half-open door of the Hall without

entering, when his vigilant stepmother, who was writing her letters by the crimson-covered table, raised her head, saw him, and at once went out to meet him in the wide entrance. A lamp burning against the wall, feebly lit the staircase winding up in gloom.

"I have heard from Robert," she whispered confidentially.

"So have I: he has been to a fancy ball, has he not?"

"Ah! Why has he not your coolness, your firmness—" A loud crash within, followed by a French oath, interrupted the list of Mr. Osborne's qualities. Capitaine Joseph amused himself by playing chess alone in a window, and Isabella by walking up and down the room reading Hugo. Isabella was a fine girl, she occupied some space; several feet, some inches, did the circumference of her robes measure. As she passed by her brother, a flying flounce hooked a nail; down came table and chessmen. Capitaine Joseph's very moustache quivered, but Isabella only looked grand, and said imperially:

"Well!"

"Well, this is the third time!" cried Capitaine Joseph.

"Oh, what a noise they do make!" moaned Anna.

"Come, come, I will have peace. William is come back," said Mrs. Osborne attempting to lead him in.

"Ah! bah! you are actually come back," cried Capitaine Joseph, recovering his good humour at

once, and going up to Mr. Osborne to bestow on him a cordial shake of the hand. "Ah! mon cher, what a life I had of it in your absence! that foolish De Launay."

"No, no: I will allow no detraction," interrupted Mrs. Osborne. "William, you really must come in. I must speak to you."

Mr. Osborne yielded, but with evident weariness and ennui.

"Now do not be alarmed," she said graciously. "I have asked a few friends to dine with us to-morrow—the de Launays and the Mazois; and you must not be engaged—no, you really must not. It is only a quiet little dinner."

Mr. Osborne gave her a rapid look, but he bowed and gave consent.

"And now you must really allow me to retire," he said. "I have been riding all day."

"And that is dreadfully fatiguing," put in Capitaine Joseph. "I hate cavalry. By the way, what has become of that pretty little girl who awoke me the first morning I was here? I have not seen her since."

Mrs. Osborne was struck with the evident interest with which her stepson waited for the reply to this question, but she carelessly said:

"She is gone. She is something or other to Mademoiselle de Janson."

"I am glad she is gone," said Anna. "I do not like her."

"All girls are a nuisance," gravely said Isabella, who was not eighteen.

"Ah, bah! She is a nice little thing," put in Capitaine Joseph. "But women do not admire each other."

"Do men?" asked Isabella.

"My dear children," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, who saw her stepson smiling ironically, "let there be peace I pray you."

Mr. Osborne was at the door; he turned round, bade them all good night, and left them to the enjoyment of the argument.

Courcelles was sadly in want of repair, and to the dismay of the ladies, masons made their appearance the next morning and filled the Manor with noise and dust. Needless to say, that Mr. Osborne was in the midst of them. With his hat on, and his coat finely powdered with white, he stood on a scaffolding surveying the beginning of their work, whilst they were taking their frugal breakfast below, when a light rustling sound above, made him look up. With surprise, he saw Adèle.

She sat on the sill of a small circular window, half in and half out; her feet rested on a sculptured ledge, her hands were clasped around her knees, her look was fixed on the uneven line of mountains before her. Mr. Osborne she did not see; he stood too near the wall. He was going to address her, but she did not give him time. She rose, cast a quick look around, leaped down on the scaffolding light as a squirrel, skipped down a ladder, and was running along a garden path before he had fairly recovered from his surprise.

Adèle never stopped until she reached the flight

of steps that led to the lake. The sun had not come there yet; the spot was cool and shady. She sat down on the balustrade, and looking at the clear water beneath her, she fell into a delightful dream, of which the prevailing feeling was solitude and liberty.

Spite some petulance and some waywardness, her nature was gentle, but it was also untamed and free. Ignorance often made her too daring; for no sad experience had taught her the virtue of mistrust, but it had also left untouched a native wildness which had grown up with her growth, and which nothing in after-life could efface. Restraint she had never known even in name, for she had never been loved enough to be checked. Mademoiselle de Janson, convinced that the world was going away, did not see the necessity of teasing herself and her god-daughter with useless control; Jeannette did, indeed, try to interfere, but she only had the limited authority of a faithful servant, and could not rule one whom she was also bound to obey. Natural delicacy, and that innate sense of grace, which is born with some individuals, as it is sometimes with whole races, saved Adèle from either rude motion or rude speech. Though untaught and wild, she was still a lady and a girl, but at the same time a youth of liberty rendered her unable to bear restraint. It stifled and oppressed her like the close air of a prison.

In a moment of kindness and generosity, Adèle had promised Jeannette to keep out of the way of the English family, and not to pass the threshold of

certain rooms up-stairs; but Jeannette, having unfortunately thought proper to ensure the performance of that promise, by locking her young mistress in, Adèle, indignant and angry, considered herself free to break her word, and made her escape. Once in the garden, she only felt the delight and happiness of her recovered freedom.

And it was a day to linger out. Below her lay the lake, cool and green; around it rose mountains with blue depths of shade and bold projections, basking in the noonday sun. Wild and steep was their aspect; a savage solitude in which the artist would wander with delight, and where the poet would love to linger. On the lake sailed a boat with a white sail. Adèle knew by Jeannette that Mr. Osborne had purchased a boat, though he had not yet been out in it. She slowly followed the slender craft in its track, as it idly skirted the opposite bank.

"How delightful to sail away for ever in a white boat," she thought, "with the sun always shining, and the shore never reached. Is that his boat? is he in it?"

She shaded her eyes with her hand, the better to see; but a slight sound made her turn her head. She looked, and saw Mr. Osborne behind her.

"I am glad to see you safe," he said.

At first, Adèle did not understand; then suddenly she guessed that he had seen her, and she smiled triumphantly.

"I can do a great deal more than that," she said; "I can climb in a tree."

"And perch there like a bird on a bough, very likely; and, indeed, I thought you had flown away like a bird."

The young girl pouted.

"Jeannette is so tiresome," she said, "but I will not be a prisoner in those dull rooms up-stairs where I cannot breathe; I will not sit and sew, and hear what a great family the De Courcelles were. What should I have done but for the books you were so kind as to send me? Oh, they have made me long to know so many things, and one thing above all!"

"Music? drawing?"

"Oh, I might as well wish for wings!"

"History is more accessible."

"Yes, but what should I do with history?"

"True, you are a contemner of the past."

"Jeannette calls me a Jacobin."

"I fear Jeannette is in the right. But what can you so much desire to know?"

"What a city is like," she said, looking in his face with a look that plainly said, "tell me."

Mr. Osborne looked at the ancient garden so beautiful in its decay; his gaze took in the aspect of the yet more ancient hills; it reposed on the freshness of their verdure, on the cool surface of the glittering lake, and embraced the whole azure expanse of the summer heavens. "A city," he thought, "a city with its living millions, its swarming streets, its close houses, and ever-clouded sky! who would wish for a city?" And here was one who from the very bosom of nature pined for fuller knowledge of the dwellings of man. His mind

repeated to his mind the question, "What is a city like?" It embraced the strange activity of life, and penetrated the mysterious depths of the human hive; it saw Splendour in her palace, Misery in her hovel, and next to both, the child of one, and the parent of the other—Vice: and he quite forgot Adèle and her expecting look.

"What can he be thinking of?" she wondered; "he is odd!"

Longer still she might have wondered, if the approach of M. François Morel had not put an end to her expectation, and to the conversation. Mr. Osborne hastily looked at the packet of papers presented to him by the foreman, then with a clouded brow he turned to Adèle and bade her good morning. At the corner of an alley he met his stepmother returning from an early walk. He signed to M. Morel to go on, and stopped to speak to her.

"I have a favour to ask of you," he said. She looked pleased and expectant. He pursued—"I should like Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles, who is still here, to be one of your dinner guests; it might amuse or please her."

"Dear me! I should be most happy!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, smiling; "but would it be kind to ask her?"

"Why not?"

"Ah, it is so difficult to make men understand these things. But what should the poor girl wear?"

"I had forgotten that all-important consideration—dress; yet I think it would trouble Mademoiselle de Courcelles very little."

"My dear William, granting, for the sake of argument, that Mademoiselle de Courcelles is such a little philosopher, would it be right to expose her to a slight, not expressed, of course, but none the less felt? Remember that this is a small provincial place."

"You are right, and I am wrong," he interrupted—but he looked little pleased—"let it be."

"Is there any other way in which I can be agreeable to Mademoiselle de Courcelles?" graciously asked Mrs. Osborne.

Mr. Osborne coldly replied in the negative. She bowed her head with a sweet smile, and walked on.

CHAPTER X.

THE DINNER.

THE Manor of Courcelles was in agitation and stir; the quiet little dinner was upsetting everything. A first-rate cook had travelled all the way from Dijon; and he was in what the French call *le feu de la composition*. The guests, too, were arriving; and from the garden, where he walked impatient and annoyed, Mr. Osborne could hear their carriage-wheels rolling up the road. He had come there to enjoy peace and silence for a few moments before the coming bore, also to take a general survey of his domain, and see what he had to do there. He was too passionate a lover of nature to be very fond of such triumphs of art as were exhibited in the garden of Courcelles; and yet, as he walked on in a region which he had not visited since his return—for instead of sloping down to the lake, it rose to the foot of a low wooded mountain, that protected the Manor against the keen northern wind—he half reluctantly found a charm in the antique formality and quaintness of its clipped hedges and trees; and with

a sort of pity and regret for their decay, he looked at the fallen statues that had been left to encumber the earth—at the green, moss-grown fountains, from which living waters once had played. At length he reached the orchard. With the aspect of this quiet spot there flashed across his memory a bright picture of the past. He saw himself a boy again, stealing the ripe fruit from the tree ; and sitting down on a stone bench near him, he yielded to one of the happiest moods which he had for a long time known. Apart from recollections in which all delight, he loved orchards wild and lone like this, where wild birds sang, and bees hummed, and yellow fruit ripened and reddened in the sun, and hung within reach. He loved Nature in her tame and quiet mood, as well as in her grandeur and wild beauty. He loved a green spot like this enclosed beneath a soft sky, where clouds floated on for ever and ever away, as well as the vastness of a campagna meeting the boundless horizons of azure heavens. Gradually he sank down, reclining on the bench on which he had been sitting. The cares of business and of life were forgotten ; plunged in a dream as languid as that of the lotos-eaters of yore, but more sweet, he wandered into far dreamland. He entered lone and enchanted orchards, tasted of enchanted fruit, breathed enchanted air, and still man, though mortal no more, he wooed strange princesses, and was beloved. Their perfumed breath fell on his brow—their calm, white hands enfolded him on silken laps—their low voices murmured him to charmed slumbers. But truth is better than dreams, any day. He heard

a light step falling on the grass, he heard a light voice singing a gay, capricious warbling like the chirruping of a young bird, and he saw Adèle, in plain brown frock and narrow collar, gliding through the trees.

Though Adèle did not know that Anna did not like her, that Isabella thought her a nuisance, and that Mrs. Osborne would rather not have had her in the house, she shunned the English family of her own accord; and on this, the evening of the dinner, she had retired to the orchard with a volume of poems. But vainly she tried to read.

Books were made for the shade of quiet rooms, for the stillness of calm and silent cloisters, but not for nature and open sky. The hum of an insect, the passing of the wind, a rustling leaf, a floating cloud—were more to Adèle than the sweetest song of man. She dropped the book for a while, then forgot it, to sit down in the grass and remember nothing save the beauty of the hour. She was unconscious of the vicinity of Mr. Osborne, until she saw him leaning against a tree opposite that beneath which she was sitting. His look fell on the volume in the grass, and at once Adèle exclaimed,

“I could not read!”

“Not read poetry?” he said, taking up the volume, “incredible!”

Adèle looked abashed for a while; then suddenly raising her head again, she said, boldly—

“Why not?—if I am stupid!”

“Ay—if! But, sincerely—do you think you are?”

She laughed, and frankly answered, “No!”

He smiled, pleased with her daring and her can-

dour ; and curious to know what direction her literary tastes took, he opened the volume, and read in measured accents one of those beautiful poems which Lamartine wrote in his youth. She heard him, intent as disciples listened of yore to their teacher in the groves of Academe.

"I like it now," she said.

"And why not before?"

"I cannot tell ; perhaps because the day was too bright, and the sky was too blue."

She picked up a fallen apple in the grass, and making a ball of it, she gaily tossed it up in the air until she was tired. He watched her with quiet pleasure, until the sound of another carriage warned him to go.

"I envy you," he said ; "you can stay here, and I must go to a hot room, and spend the whole evening there."

"And is there never pleasure in a hot room then?" asked Adèle.

"For some there is, no doubt ; not for me, I confess it."

Adèle leaned her cheek and her dimpled chin in her hand, and fixed her look like one in a dream.

"Oh ! yes, it must be pleasant," she half involuntarily exclaimed ; "the faces, the looks, the talking ; —yes, one would like to know what it is like. Ah ! bah !" she added, after a brief pause, and quickly consoled, as was the wont of her easy philosophy ; "one is well out here, too. Good evening ! I hope you may enjoy yourself, even in the hot room !"

She gave him a nod, picked up her apple, and

resumed her pastime. Soon her light figure vanished among the orchard-trees. Reluctantly he bade adieu to its golden sky and its murmuring boughs through which the breeze passed so sweetly; reluctantly he exchanged these for the closeness of a drawing-room, and the faces of dinner-guests.

As he entered the large and old-fashioned, but handsome, red and gold saloon, Mr. Osborne caught a picture of the whole party in one rapid glance. Near the central table stood Mrs. Osborne graciously entertaining Monsieur Mazois, a fat and wealthy manufacturer. Arthur Mazois, his puny son, endeavoured to make himself agreeable to Anna, who shivered on a couch, answered him through her teeth—lest the cold should get in—and looked very like a little wax doll. Madame Mazois, a somewhat overblown beauty, sat in a deep armchair, basking in her own radiance like a sunflower, whilst her three daughters, fine, fresh girls, with black eyes, white teeth, and pink dresses, received such attention as Monsieur de Launay could spare from Isabella, cool, haughty, like a princess, and looking very handsome in her mourning.

At the further end of the apartment, Capitaine Joseph—yellow, withered, and self-satisfied as usual—entertained—his hands behind his back—à la Napoléon—a little dry, brown lady, of some sixty years of age—who was no other than Madame de Launay—famous, and justly famous, in the French commercial world. Forty years before, she and her brother, Mathieu Delaunay, had opened a poor ironmonger's shop in the town of St. Etienne. They

were an obscure pair, uneducated, either of them ; yet Monsieur le Baron de Launay had died worth some millions ; and Madame de Launay, his sister, was still really, though not ostensibly, the head of a large and honourable house of business. Mathieu had some mechanical talent, and his sister could have ruled an empire. He made a discovery, and she turned it to profit. Subtle, ambitious, persevering, prudent, she never rested until she made a rich man, a baron, and a deputy, of her brother, who had the docility and the good sense to let her do for him what he could never have done for himself. He was dead now, and his only son, Auguste de Launay, rivalled his father in deference and obedience ; Madame de Launay was what she had ever been—the head of the family. Nothing in her manner or appearance justified, however, the position which she held. She was a little, withered old woman, with a quick eye and a short way of speaking. She had educated herself enough to pass in the world, and no more ; and, to all seeming, knitting was the sole passion of her mind, and the chief occupation of her life. She now listened, with short nods, to the speech of Capitaine Joseph.

The stir produced by Mr. Osborne's appearance was comparatively slight, The French glide into such things, and do not make a labour of the pleasures of life. Every one present contrived to become acquainted, without effort, with the master of the house ; and Mr. Osborne, who knew that he was in anything but distinguished society, the peerless

baron excepted, admired all the more this innate good breeding.

"I am so disappointed," whispered his step-mother; "Monsieur Joly, the Deputy, has sent in a note of excuse."

Mr. Osborne had not time to express a polite regret. Isabella came and took his arm, and led him to the Baron, who stood waiting, and looked magnificent, though affable—a sort of Louis XIV. without the full-bottomed wig. His self-satisfied condescension was insufferable to the silent pride of Mr. Osborne. Vain were the attempts of Isabella to create an impossible sympathy between her brother and her adorer. She assumed, moreover, a bold and grand style; she tossed her fair curls with a liberality; she rattled with a vehemence, as much put on as real, that highly displeased Mr. Osborne. He saw well enough that she was throwing herself at the head of a man who thought her a fine girl, and stopped there. Mr. Osborne endeavoured to check her, and failed. She would be dashing, original, and brilliant. Seeing this, he coolly left her, and introduced himself to Madame Mazois.

"And how do you like our little wild nook of a place?" asked, or rather lisped, that comfortable lady.

"I like it greatly."

"Is it possible!" cried the three Mademoiselles Mazois, turning up their eyes, and fanning themselves all at once.

"Why not?" he enquired.

They shook their heads, and still fanned them-

selves, whilst their mamma, who did not seem sure of what she ought to say, think, or do, or, indeed, of what she was, gave them a stealthy look.

"Yes," she said, vaguely, "yes ; but there are—"

"No ideas," suggested her daughters, in a breath.

"No ideas," she said, much relieved.

"No ideas!" repeated her daughters ; and again the three fans went on vigorously.

"How do people live?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Live!" exclaimed the three fans, agitatedly, "they do not ; they vegetate."

"They vegetate!" emphatically said Madame Mazois.

Mr. Osborne glanced at her corpulent person, and thought how comfortable vegetating must be. A side-look at the three plump and buxom Mademoiselles Mazois confirmed him in this opinion ; but of course he condoled aloud with the misfortunes of four such intellectual ladies. The three fans assured him he could have no idea of the horrors they endured.

"None !" echoed their mamma.

And thus the conversation went on.

And now these preliminaries are over ; the dinner-bell has rung ; the guests are seated round a most inviting table, in the old stone Hall ; and Mrs. Osborne, glancing at every luxury which the season allows and money can procure, excuses herself for the homeliness of the fare—when a piercing scream is heard. Every spoon dipped in soup is raised aloft in amazement. Madame Mazois—the blooming Madame Mazois—has sunk back in her chair, pale

as death. She makes the sign of the cross. She once moved in humble life, and has retained popular customs, and agitatedly exclaims—

“Madame! we are thirteen at table!”

She rises in great haste, lest death should overtake her. Her three daughters turn crimson at mamma’s vulgarity, and give her reproachful looks, which she does not heed.

Mrs. Osborne’s keen blue eye runs round the table, and reckons quick as thought. It is too true.

“Ah! bah!” says Madame de Launay, “what matter!”

“Yes,” says Capitaine Joseph, “what matter!”

More faintly the Baron echoes: “An idle superstition.”

“I am so concerned!” says Mrs. Osborne, who is indeed annoyed at Madame Mazois’s stupidity. “But the remedy is easy: Capitaine Joseph shall dine at a side table.”

“Delighted to do so,” cries Capitaine Joseph, starting up with ready gallantry.

Vain kindness. Madame Mazois’s nerves, though comfortably clothed in flesh, are sensitive; besides, she dreamed last night—her three daughters vainly long for a gag—of a wedding, certain sign of a funeral. In short, it is plain that Capitaine Joseph or some one else must leave the room.

Mrs. Osborne looked disturbed. She could not turn out her eldest son; she could not disoblige Madame Mazois: suddenly a lucky thought came to her. She whispered a few words to Capitaine Joseph; he nodded, vanished for a few minutes, then

returned with a significant and satisfied smile, that said, "All right."

"In a few minutes," said Mrs. Osborne, "my blunder will be repaired. We shall have a fourteenth guest. Will that be right?"

"Oh! quite," replied Madame Mazois, whom she addressed, "quite;" but she would not sit down nor yet eat her dinner before the appearance of this promised fourteenth guest.

At length the door opened, noiselessly and partially; a little, white hand appeared, then quickly vanished; then it appeared again and was not withdrawn, then followed a clear, young face, and finally a small, dark-haired girl stood on the threshold of the room. With the solemn seriousness of a child she looked round the table, detected her vacant place between Madame Mazois and Capitaine Joseph, and glided into it with the dignity of a little duchess. A few looks she got which she received calmly, then she did what everyone else around her was doing: she ate her dinner.

On recognising Adèle, Mr. Osborne gave his step-mother a look of severe surprise. She had done for her personal convenience what she had refused to do at his request. She had conferred a slight where he had meant a kindness. The truth was, that in her wish to oblige Madame Mazois, Mrs. Osborne had completely forgotten her stepson; but she was too sensible to try and repair her blunder by apology of look or speech. She returned his look with her sweetest smile, and let him think what he pleased. His glance soon reverted to Adèle, opposite whom

he sat, and who, with a pleased and happy smile, met his bow of recognition.

No one else minded her. Madame Mazois was too large to see so small an object. Capitaine Joseph was too much engrossed with helping the three pink beauties to every dainty, to give much attention to his little neighbour. The guests became merry; they talked, they laughed; but no one had a word for the young girl in the brown frock. She was left as much out of the gay speeches, the pretty flirtings, the witty jests and wise remarks that went on around her, as if she had not had eyes to see or ears to hear. The same exclusion followed her in the drawing-room upstairs. She sat in a deep recess, to which Mrs. Osborne had kindly taken her, giving her a book of sketches to amuse herself with; the book lay on the table, she bent over it engrossed, and no one came near her. Like a statue, she remained forgotten and apart. Yet she was young, prettier than any other girl present, and her quick eye and rosy lips looked as if she too could have taken up and thrown back the merry speech, and reply; but she wore a poor little brown frock! Irremissible sin!

"You were fortunate in finding so soon a fourteenth guest," said Mr. Osborne, turning to Capitaine Joseph who stood near him with his hands behind his back.

"Yes, was I not?" he complacently replied, taking to himself the whole merit of the transaction; "and the little thing was delighted to come too. She really is very pretty," he added, giving her a care-

less glance. "By the way," he resumed, confidentially, "I want you, who are a man of business, to advise me. Now which of the three Mademoiselles Mazois ought I marry? They are very much alike, and they have the same fortunes, and I really do not care which I have."

"Then find out which of the three will have you," drily answered Mr. Osborne.

Capitaine Joseph stared amazed. "Why, any of them will, any day I ask them," he said, with a smile of happy security; "but though I have been looking at them the whole evening, I cannot make up my mind which to take."

"Very awkward. Have you thought of this long?"

"Ever since dinner time."

"And you have not made up your mind yet. I thought you were more decisive."

"Ah!" answered Capitaine Joseph, turning up his eyes with an emphatic smack of his lips, "if one of them were only like the little girl at the table there beyond, I should not be so long about it. To tell you the truth, I like dainty little ladies, who look and sing like wild birds."

"Then why not try your fortune there?—do you fear a rejection?"

"A rejection! You are dreaming. She would jump to have me; but what should I do with her? She has no money—not a sou."

Here the attention of Capitaine Joseph was claimed and called away by the Baron.

"Poor child!" thought Mr. Osborne, compassionately looking at Adèle.

He stood by Madame Mazois. Her head had fallen back in her chair; her mouth was slightly open; Madame Mazois was fast asleep. Mr. Osborne smiled, rose, crossed the whole saloon, walked to the table by which the young girl sat, drew a chair nearer hers, and quietly sat down by her side. A rapid blush of pleasure rose to her cheek and overspread her whole face; her blue eyes beamed again, her whole aspect said, "I did not think you would come; I am glad."

At once the act was perceived, and commented upon by the whole room. The Mazois did not like it at all; Madame de Launay took a pinch of snuff. Anna, already indignant at the presence of Adèle, felt peevishly provoked. Isabella gave her brother and the young girl an ironical look, then turned back to Monieur de Launay, who coloured slightly, and smiled.

"How do you like my sketches?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Yours,—they are yours?" she exclaimed, amazed; "oh! how clever you are! How wonderful!" He smiled.

"And have you seen all these places?" she cried.

"Every one of them."

And pleased to please one whose pleasures were so few—pleased to avenge her of all the slights and insolence she had received—he remained sitting there by her, describing, explaining, answering, and letting his step-mother's guests see how much he

liked what they so fastidiously despised. This Adèle did not feel ; but no one had ever spoken to her so before, with intellect, and thought, and suave courtesy, and friendly aspect too. She drank in fascination through every sense. She saw no face, she heard no voice, but his. Mr. Osborne was not so absorbed. He perceived that the guests were deserting the saloon ; they were passing through the little Gothic gallery on to the flight of steps that led to the moonlit garden.

“ Shall we go too ? ” he asked, rising.

She assented eagerly. He wanted to take her arm ; but, unused to these forms of society, and having always felt competent to walk without support, she darted down the steps with her usual vivacity. Mr. Osborne smiled.

“ Dear little creature,” said his stepmother, who alone had remained behind.

“ She is a very charming girl,” he replied, coldly. And he, too, descended.

Mr. Osborne had not time to look for Adèle ; he was at once seized upon by Capitaine Joseph, who, taking hold of his right arm, led him into an alley, and asked, in a confidential whisper—

“ Well, which of the three ought I take ? I saw you looking at them.”

“ True ; but I must look again. Where are they ? ”

“ In the main alley. Look well this time ! ”

He released him ; but scarcely was Mr. Osborne free, when Monsieur Mazois claimed his attention. Mr. Osborne submitted. They walked away in a retired alley, and Monsieur Mazois, after a length-

ened prelude, spoke ; and Mr. Osborne, with indignant surprise, thus learned what his stepmother had been busy about since her arrival—a business partnership between Mr. Osborne and the De Launays—and a matrimonial alliance between Isabella and the Baron were the theme on which Monsieur Mazois eloquently dwelt. As coldly and as civilly as he could, Mr. Osborne declined both proposals. A little stiffly, Monsieur Mazois begged that he would please himself, and apologizing for having troubled him so long, he let him go.

Mr. Osborne walked alone along a quiet path, and meditated over the communication he had just received. “Oh ! weariness of life !” he thought, “ wilt thou never cease !” He looked up. How beautiful was the night !—how serene were those dark blue heavens, where the moon sailed away over and beyond the mountains ; how calm and pure looked that lake, in which another moon lay and slept, queen of a watery world below, as her sister was queen of the heavenly realm above. With a delight that thrilled through every fibre of his being, he looked from one to the other, and forgot all, save those two fair faces, that both seemed to say, “ Leave us if you dare ;—leave us if you dare.” The turning of the path he was following suddenly brought him to the spot which, had he been less absorbed, he would surely have shunned—the main alley, where all the guests were gathered in groups. The ladies glided along the moonlit path, and looked light and ethereal ; the taller and dark figures of the men moved amongst them like spectral shadows ; frag-

ments of their broken speech, and the sound of their laughter, reached his ear. But Mr. Osborne neither heard the voice nor saw the figure of Adèle.

"Well, and what are you thinking of, melancholy Jacques?" said the light voice of Isabella at his side.

He looked up, saw her, and with her saw the Baron.

"A most lovely night," said the Baron, giving the evening his unqualified approbation.

"I want you two to give me a rowing on the lake," resumed Isabella, in her decisive way. "I have never been on a moonlit lake, and on one I must go."

Whilst she was speaking, Mr. Osborne caught sight of a little figure lingering alone and unheeded in the alley; and as it passed, he summoned it to his side, with the magic question—

"Would Mademoiselle Adèle like to go on the lake with his sister?"

"Oh! so much!" she exclaimed, eagerly; and at once she came forward.

Isabella drew herself up, and shivered, and said something about night air; but Mr. Osborne quietly overruled her, and though somewhat haughtily, Isabella submitted.

"Are you really not afraid of the chill breath of the lake?" objected the baron, who had no great fancy for the task thus laid upon him.

"I fear nothing," said Isabella, a little indignant at what she considered his effeminacy.

"*Sans peur et sans reproche*," rejoined the Baron, sacrificing himself, with a smile and a bow.

They were within a few steps of the spot where Mr. Osborne's boat lay moored. Soon it was unfastened. Isabella entered it majestically; Adèle, with less dignity, sat down opposite her; then the two rowers took their places: a stroke of the oar, and the little craft flew away on the silent lake, and paused on reaching its centre.

Mountains enclosed them on every side, save that of the Manor. Above them hung the moon, full and clear; she touched with light a little village and its church, that lay to their left, and shone full on a white house to their right. It was a modern and elegant dwelling, with steps washed by the waters of the lake, and large gardens around it, that filled the night air with their fragrance. Mr. Osborne looked at it fixedly, for a light burned in the drawing-room, and it was the house of M. Lascours. The Baron spoke.

"One of the handsomest women in the whole district lives there," he said.

"Yes; is she not handsome?" exclaimed Adèle, enthusiastically, "and so good, too."

Even in the pale moonlight Mr. Osborne saw her cheek flush, and he smiled at her ardour. He saw, too, M. de Launay bite his lip and look at her fixedly. A sound of voices rose from the garden. M. Lascours was talking to his wife.

"Do you wish to stay out, Alice?" he said.

"Which ever you please," was the low reply.

"Perhaps you would rather stay out."

"I have no wish either way."

"Let us go in, then."

And the speakers, invisible before, now appeared walking along the alley that led to the house.

"I did not know Monsieur and Madame Lascours were come back," said Monsieur de Launay, as the boat once more floated lightly on the waters.

No one replied ; Mr. Osborne seemed very intent in looking at Adèle. She sat in a simple and naive attitude, with her hands folded on her knees, and her look fixed on the floating image of the moon in the lake. He smiled at her intent gaze, and Isabella saw the look and the smile, and curled her lip with scorn. "What fools men are," she thought. Suddenly Adèle started. The bell of the village church had wakened from its sleep, and was telling the hour.

"Eleven!" exclaimed Adèle, amazed when it ceased ; "can it be eleven?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Osborne, smiling.

"But I promised Jeannette to be with her at ten ; she will be so tired."

"We will land you at once," said Mr. Osborne.

They rowed her to the steps ; she alighted first, bade them a hasty good night, and vanished.

"There goes Cinderella," ironically said Isabella, landing in her turn. "I hope she has left no glass slipper behind."

"Oh, you truants!" said Mrs. Osborne, coming up to them ; "where have you been, enjoying the delightful moonlight on the lake?"

"Delightful, indeed!" enthusiastically echoed the Baron.

"I thought 'you were cold,'" sharply said the fair Isabella.

Mr. Osborne heard no more : he saw the Mazois coming in a group, and quietly entered a secluded path.

It was half-past eleven when, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, Adèle entered her room. Jeannette sat there waiting for her young mistress, and with a promptitude which would have justified the theory of those profound metaphysicians, who have discovered that hypocrisy is natural to the human heart, she assumed an air of sleep and fatigue, that said so plainly, "I am worn out with watching," that Adèle exclaimed—

"Poor Jeannette ! why did you wait ?"

"I did my duty," solemnly replied Jeannette ; "I have been forty years in the family, and I hope I know my duty."

An expression of mingled alarm and ennui clouded the open face of the young girl.

"Oh, Jeannette !" she said, "you are going to preach and to be tiresome."

Jeannette snuffed, and looked highly offended.

"Mademoiselle need not be afraid," she said ; "I know my duty ; and since my old tongue troubles the ears of Mademoiselle, it shall be silent. I have only this to say, that never has such an insult been offered to the family of Courcelles as it received on this day, when Capitaine Joseph had the insolence to ask Mademoiselle Adèle to sit as fourteenth guest at Madame Osborne's table."

We once heard it said by a shrewd observer of

life, that the sons and daughters of an ancient race, however humble of spirit or democratic of opinion they may be, never forget their origin. Adèle never thought of her birth, did not value it a rush, and fully merited the name of little Jacobin conferred upon her by Jeannette; but she had heard too often that she was descended from a noble line, that amongst her ancestors she numbered sovereigns, ever to forget facts so obvious.

"Ah, bah!" she said, gaily; "did I go amongst princes, or was there one there who can go back to Charles the Bold or Philip the Good?" 'Wherever I sit is the head of the table,' said the O'Donnell, and in the same spirit this little careless girl knew that where she went she conferred, and could not receive honour.

"Blood is blood, after all," thought Jeannette, struck with this reasoning, and looking admiringly at her spirited little mistress; but unwilling to give in, she asked aloud if Mrs. Osborne had meant a politeness or an impertinence.

"Neither," quietly replied Adèle; "she asked me for her convenience—I went for my pleasure. And oh, Jeannette! I have so much to tell you."

Jeannette allowed herself to be mollified. She thought more of the dinner than she chose to say. It was long, indeed, since the kitchen of the Manor had emitted such a fragrance as had been extracted from it that evening by the potent alchemyst, the cook from Dijon. It was long since the old Manor had heard so much rustling of silk as had come to it around the ample persons of Madame Mazois and

her daughters. Not that Jeannette knew much of the latter fact. "Mariette Mazois," as she had informed Jean, "was her nephew's gossip, a little barefoot chit of a thing, who used to run about on errands until old Mazois picked her up." Jeannette united the forefinger and thumb of her right hand, and raised them aloft with profound scorn: "Picked her up, I say, and married her. And now, Monsieur Jean, money rules the world, and because she feels faint and nervous, poor little Mamzelle Adèle must needs sit at the same table with her. Money rules the world."

And money, or the dazzling glow which money sheds, ruled Jeannette, as well as the world. She longed to know two things: how Mariette Mazois was dressed, her pride had not allowed her to ascertain the fact for herself, and if she still wanted her two front upper teeth, or had got them put in in Lyons. This intelligence Adèle could give, and Jeannette condescended to be good-tempered, and to observe that she was glad Mademoiselle had been entertained.

"Delighted, Jeannette," eagerly exclaimed Adèle; "Monsieur Osborne draws like an angel. I have seen all his sketches; he has been everywhere. Oh! what a wonderful man! And he took me on the lake in his boat."

"Alone?" asked Jeannette, frowning.

"No, with his sister, and the tall, fair man who calls on cousin sometimes."

"I am surprised Monsieur Osborne found so much time to bestow on Mademoiselle," drily said

Jeannette, "considering there was no less a person present than Madame Mazois."

"Who is she?"

"A stout, vulgar-looking woman."

"I sat near a stout lady, and I think they called her Madame Mazois."

"Ah! she was splendidly dressed, I dare say."

Adèle did not know; she had not minded.

"And her teeth," persisted Jeannette, "did Mademoiselle notice her teeth?"

"What about them?" asked Adèle, opening her eyes at the question.

"She wanted two of the upper front ones in my time."

"She may want them still, for all I can say," carelessly replied Adèle; "but she seemed to make good use at dinner of those she has."

"She has got them in, no doubt about it," grumbled Jeannette. "Ah! well," she added, comforting herself with the reflection, "next year, please Heaven, I shall treat myself to a set of teeth."

Adèle burst into a merry fit of laughter; Jeannette drew herself up indignantly.

"Mademoiselle may laugh," she said; "but times are altered, indeed, since Louis the Wicked was master of Courcelles."

"I hope so," composedly interrupted Adèle; "Monsieur Osborne, the present master of Courcelles, seems anything but wicked."

"I am surprised," stiffly said Jeannette, "that Mademoiselle can think of comparing one of her ancestors to a gentleman who can let a Mariette

Mazois sit at his table. Louis the Wicked, whom some called Louis the Devil, would have died before he allowed such a thing. Does Mademoiselle remember the story of his daughter Philippa's marriage? It is an example to all young ladies of good family."

"What about her, Jeannette?"

"She was beautiful, and she was proud. No one was good enough for her—not he—though many were the fine gentlemen who came to woo. Well, at length there came one with whom she fell over head and ears in love. They were wedded and lived happily together, until—how it was found out I cannot tell—my lord, Louis, her father, discovered that his daughter's husband was the son of a peasant. The husband did not wait for his account, but ran off, and my lady Philippa shut herself up in a turret, and vowed never again to see the face of man until her disgrace was avenged, for she had a proud spirit."

"Say a mean one, Jeannette," observed Adèle, with a smile of disdain; "a truly proud woman would be too proud to be ashamed of the husband she had taken, peasant or prince."

"My Lady Philippa did not think so," drily said Jeannette; "nay more, my lord, her father, vowed to have no peace until he avenged his daughter. So he took his horse one morning and rode out alone."

"Like a Prince in the Fairy Tales," put in Adèle, who was not without a touch of the mocking French spirit.

"Like anything Mademoiselle likes," replied

Jeannette; "but I scarcely think princes in the Fairy Tales do what Louis the Wicked did."

"Oh! Jeannette, if it is a horrible story do not tell it to me," imploringly exclaimed Adèle.

"It is not very horrible," placidly replied Jeannette, "not at least for Louis the Wicked; for Mademoiselle surely remembers, that how when he defied and killed in single combat his enemy the Lord of Nantua, he insisted on having his heart."

"Oh! do not, do not!" exclaimed Adèle; "you know I hate those stories."

But Jeannette obstinately pursued:

"Well, my Lord Louis came back at the end of a year and a day, and on his horse, behind him, he carried a bag with which he went up to his daughter's turret. And there——"

"I tell you I will not hear the rest," cried Adèle, angrily, and stopping her ears with her fingers as she spoke. "I will not know what there was in that bag. I hate Philippa and Louis the Wicked."

"He was one of Mademoiselle's ancestors," gravely said Jeannette.

"I do not care about my ancestors," impatiently replied Adèle, "not a pin, and if I am to hear all the horrible things they did, I shall wish I never had any."

"If they had been quiet, well-behaved, vulgar people," said Jeannette, speaking, though she little knew it, like a modern school of history, "who would ever have heard about them? But it was because they were a fierce and cruel and a real

family that to this day mothers frighten children with their name."

"Shame on them, then," cried Adèle, her eyes sparkling with indignation, "to be remembered as a curse and not as a blessing, by the poor and the weak."

But Jeannette's prejudices were too deeply rooted to be so easily shaken.

"They were a great family, for all that," she said, and in insisting on that point, she forgot to draw, for the benefit of her little mistress, the obvious moral which the story of Philippa offered to all young ladies of good family: a moral of which Adèle would never have understood the application to herself and the present evening.

CHAPTER XI.

A TRUST.

ADÈLE rarely dreamed ; she slept with the sound, heavy sleep of youth. But on this night, the ivory gates were opened for her ; she saw herself on the lake again, but alone in the boat with Mr. Osborne ; whilst Alice, with thoughtful aspect and sad eyes, saw them floating away from her. Then the vision vanished ; Italian skies, grey olive forests that skirted azure seas, wild and graceful hills where the orange ripened and the snow never slept, ruined temples by which brown men and women sat dreamily, passed before her, until she awoke with the feeling—"How delightful to travel."

Her second thought was how many things she had to ask of Mr. Osborne when she saw him next. But Mr. Osborne was doubtless very busy. Not for that entire day did Adèle see him, nor yet for the whole of the next. Was he gone again ? She questioned Jeannette ; the old servant at once replied that Monsieur Osborne was gone to Sain Etienne.

"How tiresome!" said Adèle, "will he soon come back?"

Jeannette shrugged her shoulders. How should she know?

"I dare say he will not be long away," resumed Adèle, who rarely looked at the dark side of things; and whilst waiting for his return, she amused herself with the books he had sent her.

Ten days had passed away. Adèle sat in the maze reading, when a sound of voices in one of the neighbouring alleys roused her. Mrs. Osborne was speaking in French to a speaker, like herself, invisible.

"No, no," she said, in her sweetest tones; "I cannot believe that you are so ignorant, Monsieur Morel; you must know more about this dreadful business."

To which the soft voice of Monsieur Morel replied—

"I have had the honour of assuring Madame that I know nothing."

"Nothing! yet I always understood you were a very close friend of my son Robert. My late husband said as much to me."

Monsieur Morel did not answer.

"Monsieur Osborne thought highly of your talents," she resumed, "and so does Robert.—Indeed, what am I saying?—we all think highly of you. And when I think upon it, it seems impossible to me that my son, though young and inexperienced, should be mixed in this dreadful matter. Has Monsieur Osborne mentioned the matter to you?"

"Surely Madame is aware that Monsieur is too ill for business."

"That is just why I feel, Monsieur Morel, that whilst my dear son William is so ill, I am in duty bound to interfere; and I know, that with your help—"

"Madame must excuse me; I am but a poor clerk—a machine in Monsieur Osborne's hands."

"Monsieur Morel," said Mrs. Osborne, suddenly changing her tone, "you ought to remember that times may change. What, if Monsieur Osborne's fever should take a fatal turn?"

"I shall then be in Madame's hands," was the submissive reply. And as it was uttered, the two speakers entered the last circle of the maze. Several times during this discourse Adèle had impatiently looked up from her book, and wished either that she was not where she was, or that the speakers, becoming conscious of her presence, would talk lower or go away: but towards the close of their brief dialogue, her book fell on her lap. What! Mr. Osborne was not gone to Saint Etienne! What! he was lying ill—dangerously ill in the house, and she knew nothing of it!

"I assure you, Monsieur Morel," resumed Mrs. Osborne, as they entered the arbour—She paused abruptly on seeing Adèle sitting on the stone step at the foot of the statue of silence. Pale as death the young girl rose.

"What ails Monsieur Osborne?" she said; "is he ill? is he in danger?"

They both looked at her; Monsieur Morel with a

strange smile—Mrs. Osborne with a surprised and half-thoughtful gaze.

“Monsieur Osborne is better,” she said at length. “Good morning, Monsieur Morel!”

A wave of her white hand dismissed him without much ceremony. Monsieur Morel bent his head, and turned away. Mrs. Osborne went up to Adèle, and took her hand, and looked deep into her eyes.

“Poor little thing!” she said, kindly; “you are affected! we have all been sadly tried. My feelings”—she raised her handkerchief to her eyes, but only for a moment—“have been such that I must not trust myself to speak on the subject. But you will be pleased to learn that your friend Monsieur Osborne is happily out of danger; and as he will be prudent, there is, I trust, no fear of a relapse. Come, are you happy? are you comforted?”

Adèle did not answer; she seemed in a dream. Mrs. Osborne kindly patted her cheek, pressed her hand, and with a gentle good morning! left her.

“Why did Jeannette deceive me?” thought Adèle; “what does all this mean? Is it true that he is safe?” She had sat down again; she started to her feet, and rapidly crossed the garden. Coming down the flight of steps that led to Mr. Osborne’s room, she met Docteur Guillaume, a brisk, abrupt, dark, white-haired little man, who never said a kind word to a patient, and was nevertheless a sort of universal favourite. Adèle knew him well. She sprang towards him, and broke on him with the brusque enquiry—

“Docteur Guillaume, how is he?”

"Pooh! pooh! it is nothing. How are you, Mademoiselle Adèle? you look wild."

"Oh, I am well; but what has ailed him? do tell me, Docteur Guillaume."

She passed her arm within the old man's, and looked up coaxingly in his face.

"Do tell me," she entreated.

"Ah! bah! he is well enough now; he took cold on the lake, and was feverish."

"But he is safe now?" she asked.

"Ay, safe enough! I hope you are safe, Mademoiselle Adèle!" emphatically added Docteur Guillaume, withdrawing her arm from his, and walking away.

She remained amazed; and it was not until long afterwards that his meaning broke on her.

Mr. Osborne had taken cold on the lake, and cold had become strong fever. Every one knew it in the house save Adèle. Why had Jeannette concealed this from her? Clear, positive motives she certainly had: she was also out of temper with the whole affair. Louise had been called in to nurse Mr. Osborne; and though Jean had prudently asked and obtained a fortnight's leave of absence, Jeannette knew he was at the bottom of it all. Jeannette felt offended, and not disposed to humour other people. Nay, more, when Adèle, after parting from Docteur Guillaume, entered the low store-room, where Jeannette sat spinning, and, pale with displeasure, asked why Jeannette had dared to deceive her in this, Jeannette very coolly replied—

"I knew what I was about."

Reproaches, passionate questions, mild adjurations wrung no more out of her. Still Jeannette said—"I knew what I was about." Then she rose; and as evening had set in, she lit the lamp. Soon after this, she left the room.

"Poor Monsieur Osborne," thought Adèle; "dear Monsieur Osborne! how much I love him, though I know him so short a time! How cruel it was, not to tell me he was ill! If I could have done nothing else, could I not have prayed for him to Almighty God, who despises not the meanest creature's prayers?"

The return of Jeannette interrupted her reflections. Jeannette's brow was so clouded, that Adèle at once cried—

"Jeannette, what is it?—Is Monsieur Osborne worse?"

"Monsieur Osborne is up and well enough," drily replied Jeannette; "but I never heard anything like it—never."

"Jeannette, what do you mean?"

"Well, then," desperately said Jeannette, "Monsieur wants to speak to you."

"To me!"

"Ay, there it is—to you, indeed. What can Monsieur want with Mademoiselle, at this hour, too?"

"He would not send for me if he did not want me," observed Adèle, decisively; "so let us go at once."

For some reason or other, Jeannette seemed quite subdued; and without opposing further resistance,

she showed her young mistress the way. The night was dark, the garden was silent; they went along a lonely path until they reached the flight of steps that led to Mr. Osborne's study. Light glowed behind the red curtain that fell to the floor, and excluded the night air. Adèle raised it timidly, and without advancing looked in. Mr. Osborne did not see her. He sat writing at his desk; the light of the lamp fell on his face; it was pale and haggard, and looked to Adèle worn with trouble and care more than fever.

"May I come in?" she said, gently.

He looked up, saw her, and his face lit with pleasure. He attempted to rise, but Adèle did not give him time.

"I was so sorry that you had been ill," she said, a little eagerly; "I am so glad that you are well again."

But without seeming to have heard her, he said—

"I knew you would come; I knew I could send for you."

The earnestness of his tone surprised her; she raised her eyes to his, as much as to say "of course," and sat down on the chair near his, to which he pointed.

Mr. Osborne was going to speak, but looking up, he saw Jeannette standing by the door, and he said quietly—

"Wait in the next room, Jeannette, I want to speak to Mademoiselle Adèle alone."

Jeannette looked at Adèle; the young girl ratified the order with a smile; they remained alone. But

Mr. Osborne did not speak; he sat with his brow leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed on vacant space, like one absorbed in thought. "He has forgotten all about my being here," thought Adèle, amused; but he had not, for at that very moment he looked at her and said with a smile—

"It seems pleasant to see you again, Mademoiselle Adèle; have you been well?"

"Oh, I am always well," she replied, gaily.

"And always gay and merry—happy little thing! I wish I were like you."

"And why are you not?" promptly asked Adèle.

"It would take days to answer that question, and even then you would not understand the true reason."

"Am I, then, so stupid?" asked Adèle, nettled.

"Stupid!" echoed Mr. Osborne, looking half shocked; "my dear child, never use that word in conjunction with yourself." A little blush of pleasure rose to the cheek of Adèle; her blue eyes beamed, her happy lips parted with a half smile. "He thinks me clever," she thought, delighted, for she had the weakness, if weakness it be, to love the praise of one whom she admired. Other thoughts occupied Mr. Osborne. He looked at her very earnestly, and with unusual gravity he said—

"Mademoiselle Adèle, I have known you but a very short time, yet this I know of you—you are sincere and true. If you can oblige me in the way I shall mention, you will do so; if not, you will say so at once."

Oblige him ! Adèle looked the surprise she did not speak. He smiled and sighed.

"Aye, it seems strange," he said, "and stranger will it seem, I dare say, when you have heard me out. What I want of you is this: to find me a trusty messenger who will post this letter for me before to-morrow evening, a messenger on whom you can rely, and who will neither know nor guess by whom the letter is written. I am surrounded by friends, by relatives, and servants; it seems strange to apply to you, yet necessity leaves me no choice: do you think you can oblige me thus far?"

"I can," deliberately replied Adèle, and she was too delicate to add any comments.

He handed her a sealed letter, which lay on the table before him, and said with a sad smile—

"I see you wonder—well you may. The experience of a few years will, however, teach you the value of mistrust. I hope, for your sake, the knowledge may come late,—very late. If any mischance should prevent your messenger from fulfilling this errand, you need not take the trouble of returning this letter; burn it—it will be useless. I have but one remark to add: should any one know or suspect the kindness you are going to render me, this letter will never reach its destination."

"No one shall know it," decisively said Adèle, "not even Jeannette."

"Who must be wondering at our secret conference," said Mr. Osborne, smiling, "and therefore I shall not detain you."

Adèle rose ; he leaned back in his chair, pale and wearied. She put the letter in her pocket, turned away, and came back.

"This letter is very important?" she said, looking at him fixedly.

"Very important indeed," he gravely replied.

Adèle said no more. She called Jeannette, who appeared, looking strangely perplexed. On the threshold the young girl turned to give Mr. Osborne a significant smile ; then she lightly descended the stone steps, and was once more in the garden.

"Monsieur did not hold a long conversation with Mademoiselle," said Jeannette.

"He had little to say," was the brief reply. "How altered he is ; did you notice, Jeannette?"

Jeannette had noticed nothing particular. Of course, when people had been nine days ill with fever, they must be a little altered ; but Jeannette had seen nothing beyond that. Adèle did not insist,—indeed, she said no more, but went straight up to her own room.

She locked her door, an unusual precaution, and taking the letter from her pocket, she looked at it earnestly.

It was a plain letter, with a plain seal, and directed, in a tremulous hand, to William Smith, Esq., Farrington Street, London. It had been written on a sick bed, in the vigils of fever, whilst the wearied watcher slept, and in its few lines lay a whole sad tale of mistrust and treachery. "Poor

gentleman!" thought Adèle; "is there, indeed, no one in this whole house in whom he can confide?—No one but me—a little girl!" But her heart beat and her cheek flushed, as she remembered his words: "You are sincere and true."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LETTER.

ADÈLE meant to be her own messenger. This resolve was so opposed to all the laws of decorum and etiquette which surround a French girl, that Mr. Osborne never dreamed she would take it. But she did not merely take it, she acted upon it.

No great difficulty attended the task. A short distance divided the Manor from the village of Courcelles, where there was a post-office; the road was straight and easy; to go there and come back might take an hour.

The day, which had been dark from the morning, cleared as it advanced, and the last clouds rolled away from the mountains and left the sun shining in a blue sky when Adèle emerged from the Manor on the high road. It was wild and lonely, but safe; it wound between the mountains and the lake, guarded by the arid peaks of one, and bounding the silent waters of the other. With a light step and a light heart Adèle walked on.

Now and then she turned from her path to climb

up the rocks and gather the gorgeous yellow and purple flowers that grew in their crevices, and she paused for a moment as the turning road showed her views of mountain and lake, wilder and more beautiful than those with which she was already familiar, but otherwise she did not linger. She met a few cars laden with long felled trees, from which the yellow leaves drooped half withered; a few hunters going up to the mountains; a few peasants trudging along the road. Some passed on without minding her, others looked at her curiously, for she had always lived in such seclusion that her name alone was known; but Adèle heeded neither, and went on her way careless and fearless. She rested but once. A little out of the way stood a solitary dwelling, with doors and shutters closed. Its back was to the mountain, against which it was built; trees shaded its roof; its front was to a grass-grown path, hemmed in between wild hedges, enclosing on either side wilder patches of neglected garden; desolate was the aspect of the deserted dwelling.

Adèle sat down on a low, flat stone at the angle of the path, and looked at it, and wondered why men reared their homes in sad places, when the beautiful earth had so many lovely spots. She gathered a bunch of wild clematis from the hedge, and went on. At length a few straggling houses announced the vicinity of the village. A white-washed inn, with its tempting sign of two stiff, staring men, holding glasses full of red wine, and the enticing invitation "*entrons-y*, let us go in," written underneath them, came first; then a blacksmith's forge,

where a patient-looking, grey horse was waiting to be shod, followed. A group of straight, quaint houses, gathered like gossips around an antique wall, next appeared, with the usual accompaniment of women, in short petticoats, standing in the gloom of their ancient doorways, and brown children playing and quarrelling in the sun. Adèle passed through them without stopping; and soon afterwards, she reached and entered the long, winding street called the Bourg of Courcelles. It had been a warlike place when ruled by the warlike men from whom Adèle was descended, but like the ancient family, it had dwindled away, and was now little better than an obscure village lost in the activity of a manufacturing district.

Picturesque as painter's eye need wish was that street. It rose in stairs, and on either side the uneven outline of its tall houses was cut on a background of barren mountains. Hot sunshine scorched the red-tiled roofs, but dark shadows lurked under every deep gable, and a cool gloom lingered around the stone porches and arched windows below. A few dingy shops caught, without arresting, the eye of Adèle; and when she at length paused before one, it was because that shabby stationer's window, where dingy letter-paper, and faded wax, and yellow quills were vainly spread to make a show, was also the post-office. In the act of holding her letter above the box, Adèle gave a glance at the interior of the shop. It was narrow and dark; behind the counter sat a thin and haggard-looking man with a furrowed brow and a sunken eye. He sat back with his hands

in his pockets, staring with a listless, gloomy air that struck her. But she gave him no more than a glance—no more than the time it took her to hold her letter above the slit and let it fall into the box. This done, she walked away without looking back.

“How easy it was, after all,” thought Adèle, as, after leaving the village behind her, she walked along the solitary road. “He thought so much of posting that letter, and seemed so anxious about it—why, it was nothing at all.”

A few large round drops of rain on the dusty flags at her feet roused her from these reflections. She looked up; in a few moments the whole aspect of the day had changed; a black and heavy cloud was passing across the sky, and with its reflection it darkened the narrow lake and surrounding mountains to her right. To her left rose mountains less steep, but that sloped away in wild, rugged gorges, where green torrents foamed and roared as they broke angrily over the rocks, or gurgled in the dark and narrow caverns through which they passed. One of these stood but a few yards distant from the roadside. Its overhanging rocks promised shelter during the shower, and Adèle was too much of a mountaineer to fear its yawning gloom, or to care for the hollow murmurs of its invisible waters. She entered it; and scarcely had she passed its stone threshold, when the white, slanting rain came pouring down behind her. She looked round; the opposite mountains were already clad in mist, and the surface of the still dark lake was troubled and broken with a thousand circles. But not one of the drops that

splashed on the road could reach her ; and smiling at her security, Adèle sat down on a fragment of rock, and looked up at the swift clouds drifting in the sky above, like storm-beaten ships on a rolling sea.

She had not sat and looked long when the sound of a slow trudging step on the road, roused her. She peeped out and saw a dark figure coming towards her, under the shelter of a large cotton umbrella. At once she drew back, and quietly stepped behind a projection of rock. She had recognized the awkward and slouching gait of M. François Morel, and did not care to be seen by him. He passed the cavern without raising his eyes from the earth ; she looked after him until a winding of the road hid him from her sight. He was going from the Manor to the village whence she had just come. How strange that he could not have been Mr. Osborne's messenger. " If he does not trust him, why does he keep him ? " thought Adèle with the logic and ignorance of youth. She did not think of it long.

The rain still fell heavily, and the cavern that sheltered her was a strange wild place. She rose and cautiously explored it ; but she soon paused ; it ended in a pit, it might be but a few feet deep, it might pierce the very bowels of the mountains, for all she could see. She knelt down by the brink of its abyss-like chasm and bending—she listened intently. She saw nothing below her but darkness, no glimmer of waters shivering through the gloom, nothing but depths, whence rose, like a voice of dis-

content, the rush of the torrent. She took a pebble and dropped it in ; it splashed with a hollow sound that echoed again and again until all once more was silent, and Adèle heard nothing but the rain rushing past on the sweeping wind, for it still rained. In vain she looked up at the sky for some light spot, some blue space ; the greyiness of the clouds had spread every where, and gloom hung like a dome above the mountains. There was nothing for it but patience, and patiently Adèle waited, whilst time passed on, and heavier fell the pouring rain and darker grew the day now drawing to a close.

" I shall have to walk home through the rain after all," thought Adèle, after waiting well nigh an hour. " Ah ! bah ! what matter—I shall be wet, and Jeanette will grumble, and that will be the worst of it. I wish I had Monsieur Morel's big umbrella."

Scarcely had the wish crossed her thoughts, when umbrella and owner entered the cavern.

Adèle had that presence of mind which is but another name for courage. She was sitting in the gloom ; Monsieur Morel had not seen and might not see her. To stir was to make a noise and be discovered. She remained perfectly still, quietly relying on the chance of his not turning round ; if he did, he could but see her ; if he did not, all was right.

But Monsieur Morel seemed to have enough to do in looking at the rain, and grumbling at it, though alone. Next followed the task of shaking his dripping umbrella and opening it out to dry ; then, as the rain still continued, he sat down on the same rock, at

the opening of the cavern, where Adèle had first sat, and, less patient than she had been, he wiled away the time with looking over the contents of his pocket book. Adèle could just catch a glimpse of his bent face, and thought that she had never liked its meaning less. By the time Monsieur Morel had leisurely examined the heap of large and small papers which his pocket book contained, the rain had ceased a little; at once he availed himself of the opportunity. He rose, stamped his wet feet, buttoned up his great coat, seized his umbrella, and once more trudged away. He left the cavern without having once looked round.

Adèle had not felt afraid, yet she felt relieved, when he was gone. She left the place where she had been sitting, and walked to the front of the cave; Monsieur Morel had already disappeared.

"I wonder why I dislike him," remorsefully thought Adèle, "because he is ugly! poor fellow! that is no fault of his! And it is a shame too, for I think he rather likes me."

Her thoughts proceeded no further; a square of paper, lying on the earth at the foot of the rock on which Monsieur Morel had been sitting, caught and at once rivetted her attention. Adèle looked at it without moving, and like one in a dream. Surely that was the letter she had, an hour before, put in the post office. She recognized its square shape, its peculiar pale blue English paper, and the direction written in the slanting English hand. She stooped, picked it up, and turned it round. It was the same, soiled by the wet sand of the cave on which it had lain

but still the same letter which Mr. Osborne had trusted to her care, and which she had been so anxious to carry faithfully.

Adèle was not timid, but, for the first time in her life, she felt fear. The treachery, so swift and so sure, which had overtaken that letter when it had scarcely left her hand, filled her with vague but deep terror. She thought of the haggard postmaster in his miserable shop, a ready prey for temptation—of Morel and his evil look, and the dark cave, with its darker pit, that would tell no tales; and caring little for rain or storm, she sprang out on the open road.

It was solitary, grey, and silent, like the hour. The rain had ceased, but it had left large glimmering pools, above which white clouds passed slowly from the lake to the mountain. No cars passed now, no hunters returning from their sport, no pedestrians going to and fro—nothing but a black speck moving swiftly towards her, and increasing to human size as it approached. Suddenly a thought struck her. What if Monsieur Morel had discovered his loss, and were returning to search for the letter where he had left it? Scarcely knowing what she did, she sprang down the rocks that rose between her and the lake, and stooped within the shelter of a few old willows. It was the worst place she could have chosen, but it was too late to repair the error.

She could see through the quivering foliage, and she looked intently in the direction of the figure she had perceived. It was Monsieur Morel. She saw him approach the cave, first cast a long, searching

glance around, then enter it, and look up and down. "You may look," triumphantly thought Adèle, "you may look." Something, however, Monsieur Morel found, for he held it up to the light, examined it curiously, then put it away, and resumed his useless search. Spite her position, Adèle could not help enjoying his baffled look. At length he gave up the vain task, and stood still on the threshold of the cave, with bent head and folded arms. After a few minutes spent thus, he went forth; she saw him walk slowly along the road in a bent attitude. The heart of Adèle leaped. "He is tracking my footsteps," she thought; and scarcely daring to breathe, she watched him intently; but either his heavier steps had effaced all trace of her own, or Monsieur Morel's sagacity was not equal to the task he had undertaken; for after a sufficiently long search up and down, he gave it up, climbed the highest of the neighbouring rocks, and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked round piercingly. This time Adèle thought herself discovered; a sickening sensation came over her, she shrank back, and closed her eyes. But suspense is worse than the worst reality. Unable to bear the thought of his approach, Adèle looked again—Monsieur Morel had vanished; the road was lonely.

Which way had he gone, or was he gone at all? Was he hiding—perhaps watching for her, ready to spring from among his lair in the rocks as soon as she appeared within his reach? Adèle did not stir; a breath of wind passing among the willows might betray her presence there. Motionless as a statue,

she remained watching vainly ; but she saw nothing—nothing, save the coming night. Twilight still lingered above the earth ; from the west came a lurid glow ; a few stars shone through the cloudy sky ; a troubled and declining moon was slowly rising in the east ; soon she hung above the mountains veiled in pale mists, and looking over the whole wild landscape with a sad and dreary face. But Adèle had been too early thrown on nature and solitude to fear either. The wild spot, the silent eve alarmed her not—she had no dread save of man and man's wickedness, and that was deep.

That dread, however strong, could not so far prevail over her natural fearlessness, as to make her stay where she was. She lightly climbed up to the road, gave a rapid look round, and in a moment her resolve was taken. The little post town of Nantua stood across the lake ; the boat at the ferry would take her there and back in ten minutes ; to that town she would go at once.

She quickened her step ; in a few minutes she had reached the group of gaunt houses by the well. They were silent and quiet, with here and there a light glimmering in the windows. No one was visible ; but the mere aspect of those lights, the mere consciousness of human beings nigh her, made Adèle quite fearless. She would not have cared had she met Monsieur Morel face to face. Lightly she descended the steps cut in the rock that led to the lake, the boatman was asleep on his bench.

"Quick, boatman ! I am in a hurry," said the light voice of Adèle, as she stepped in. He awoke

with a start, and seeing her by the doubtful light of his lantern, he took her for a child.

"Little girls are always in a hurry," he half grumbled. And he rowed her across without another word.

Adèle handed him his money, stepped out on the opposite bank, and found herself in the centre of a small and badly built town ; but she had been there before, and though she missed her way twice, she ended by finding herself opposite the post office.

A flourishing, gaslit grocer's shop was this, with a florid widow sitting behind the counter. Her weeds set off her blooming complexion, her frank and open face at once inspired Adèle with confidence ; her hand was on the door to enter and ask her the hour for the next post, when the sight of Monsieur Morel entering the shop by another door made her start back.

He went up to the post mistress, with his readiest bow, and was graciously received like a familiar acquaintance, then leaning on the counter, he spoke. Adèle saw the widow listen with surprise and alarm in her good-humoured face ; then she clasped her hands and turned up her eyes and shook her head ; finally she rose, took a key from her pocket, opened the letter box and spread its contents before M. Morel.

But in vain he turned them all over ; that which he wanted was not among them ; again the widow put them away, but even as she did so, she turned round and spoke. Her look, her whole aspect implied an emphatic promise. Monsieur Morel smiled

and bowed, and left by the door by which he had entered.

The rain had again begun to fall, the street was suddenly deserted, but Adèle stood still in the same spot, like one charmed or dreaming. What tale had he told the post mistress, Adèle knew not, but she had little doubt of its purport. It could concern nothing but the letter she was carrying! What to do she could not imagine. She stood irresolute and perplexed, when a light two-wheeled car drove up to the post office. Mechanically Adèle drew back to let the driver enter the shop. He passed by her, dripping with wet, and she saw by his attire that he was a postman. But wet though he was, her young face, as she stood in the gas light, with her letter in her hand, caught his attention. He saw her standing there like one perplexed, and he thought her troubled about being late.

"Put it in the box behind the car," he said, good-humouredly, "and it will go all the same.

"Where to?" eagerly asked Adèle.

"That will depend upon the direction, my dear," jocularly replied the postman.

"But where will this car take it?"

"To Dijon, to Paris, to the end of the world if you like."

He entered the shop and closed the door behind him. Adèle looked at the car; it was the government post. At the back, above a narrow slit, she read, in yellow letters, the intimation that it was for home and foreign letters: still she hesitated.

"Have you not made up your mind yet?" asked

the postman, coming out with the bags. "Because," he added, lightly springing on the seat, "I have made up my mind to be off."

The car rapidly rolled away; Adèle watched it till it vanished, then breathed relieved. Her task was over; the letter was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GLOVE.

THE storm was at its height.

"Oh! that horrid lightning!" moaned Anna.

"Sublime! magnificent!" murmured Isabella, who stood by one of the windows of the Hall looking on. Her arms were folded, her brow was knit—Isabella was in an attitude, and in one of her grand moods.

The two sisters were alone, and, as usual, ready to quarrel.

"I wish you would shut those shutters," said Anna.

"Oh! Night and darkness, ye are lovely," began Isabella, but Anna was in no mood for Childe Harold. She rose and deliberately closed the shutters in her sister's face. Isabella laughed scornfully, and did not deign to lose her temper.

"I tell you I am not going to be used so," said Anna, with sparkling eyes. "I know there is something going on, and that I am kept out of it."

"There is a storm going on," ironically replied

Isabella, "and you shut the shutters; what about it?"

"You understand me well enough!" resumed Anna, more angrily than before, "and you shall not get out of it so. I tell you there is something going on, and that I am kept out of it."

"Very wisely," coolly put in Isabella.

"Wisely or not, I am not going to stand it. I asked William for a twenty-pound note this morning, and I shall know why he would not give me some of my father's money."

"I thought Pa was dead, and that it was William's money now," observed Isabella.

Anna darted an angry look at her, but did not reply. Isabella pursued—

"Poor William! a nice, pleasant, comfortable time he must have of it. Every one has a pull at him, from Robert, whose pulls are no trifle, to Anna, who coolly asks for a twenty-pound note."

"Robert! what has Robert been doing?" sharply asked Anna.

"You may as well know it," replied Isabella, with a yawn,— "Robert has been drawing I know not how many thousands. I know it, because Ma left her desk open, and I saw the letter, in which he said he did not know why there was such a bother made about the money, and that—"

"I shall thank you not to proceed," here said the voice of Mrs. Osborne. She had entered unheard, and stood before her daughters cold and angry. But little cared either the haughty Isabella or the selfish Anna for maternal displeasure. And to do the dis-

passionate Mrs. Osborne justice, her displeasure did not last. Having been so foolish as to leave her desk open, she really could not wonder at the liberty Isabella had taken. The only thing was to be more careful another time, lock her desk, and keep her keys in her pocket. But though she felt no more anger than surprise, she thought it proper to assume a dignified wonder.

"I am astonished!" she began, sitting down, and laying on the table the little portable desk she had brought in with her. "I did not think one of my daughters could have stooped to such an action."

"Surely, Ma, you ought to know me by this," began Isabella; "you know that when I find a thing convenient—"

"But I want to know what Robert has been doing with our money?" interrupted Anna; "I am not going to be kept in the dark by the whole of you."

"Robert," said Mrs. Osborne, in a feeling tone, "has been behaving as I never thought my son could behave. He has been betraying the confidence of the most generous of brothers—"

"You need not, Ma," sarcastically interrupted Isabella—"William is not here."

A little flush rose to Mrs. Osborne's brow; to be understood and penetrated was what she could least bear, but she feigned deafness, and went on—

"Of a brother who is sacrificing his tastes, his health, his private feelings to our welfare."

"And who would not give Anna a twenty-pound note this morning," again interrupted Isabella, determined to make a scene.

"You have been asking money of William?" sharply said Mrs. Osborne, turning to her daughter.

"Of course I have," sulkily replied Anna, "and so have you."

Mrs. Osborne bit her lip, and turned scarlet. Anna had, without knowing it, told the truth, and touched on a sore point.

"Poor William!" ejaculated Isabella, compassionately. "I alone, I believe, ask nothing from him."

Mrs. Osborne turned her cold blue eye on her daughter, and said, frigidly—

"Isabella, go up to your room, and read your Bible."

"Thank you, Ma; but I fear I should not profit by your kind advice."

"I fear so, too," coldly said Mrs. Osborne; "nevertheless, follow the advice, even though you should not profit by it. Both William Osborne and your mother shall prefer you to be so engaged to entertaining a clandestine correspondence with a man who, if he meant well, would never presume to write to you without the knowledge of your family."

The lips of Isabella parted to utter a reply, but none came forth; she seemed overwhelmed. Her mother pursued—

"That the Baron means or intends evil I do not say; he neither would nor dare; but he found you free; and Frenchmen are not accustomed to so much freedom in young girls. It amused him to write to you, and you allowed it; but William, warned by me, has put an end to his amusement and to your

folly. The Baron has apologized, withdrawn—and not proposed.”

The last words, uttered slowly and deliberately, were meant to sting. Rarely did Mrs. Osborne permit herself such a display of temper; but Isabella had irritated her out of her usual calmness; and it was with something like vindictive triumph that she turned on her daughter, and taunted her with her defeat.

“William shall be answerable to me for all this!” cried Isabella, passionately starting to her feet.

But Mrs. Osborne extended her white hand, and coldly and calmly laying it on her daughter’s arm, she said—

“You shall not go near William; he has been ill; ill he is still. His health is too precious to us all to be disturbed by your caprices. I say that you shall not go.”

Her touch was light; but had physical force been needed to prevent Isabella from going near her brother, Mrs. Osborne would have used it in that hour; and for once, her will, stronger than her daughter’s at all times, prevailed, and had authority.

Isabella sat down, red and indignant. Mrs. Osborne opened her morocco desk, and Anna querulously exclaimed—

“But I want to know about the money! What has Robert been doing with our money? I want to know that.”

A flash of lightning and a loud peal of thunder that shook the house, suggested Mrs. Osborne’s reply.

“To-morrow morning will be a better time for

explanation," she said, coldly. "I confess this storm has affected my nerves, so that if I can get through my two letters, I shall think myself fortunate."

Anna murmured impatiently to herself, but did not insist. Mrs. Osborne wrote with a rapid pen, folded her letters, sealed and directed them, and having locked up her desk, walked out of the room. Isabella raised her head and listened; the whole house was still; the storm was dying away; the far wind alone murmured on the mountains beyond the lake. She looked at Anna; Anna had fretted herself into a doze, in her chair.

Isabella smiled scornfully, rose, and with noiseless step left the room. She went up straight to her mother's apartment and tapped at the door. She received no reply; unhesitatingly she opened it, a light burned on a table, but the room was vacant. Isabella turned away, descended the staircase, crossed the court, and entered the garden.

The darkness of night covered the avenue she followed; rain drops fell on her bare head from the quivering trees; treacherous pools of wet waylaid her lightly-covered feet: but Isabella heeded nothing; on she went, until she reached the foot of the stone staircase that led to her brother's study. There she paused and listened: a sound of subdued voices soon reached her ear. She recognised the low tones of William, the soft voice of her mother, and, without waiting for thought or reflection, she swiftly ascended the flight of steps and paused on the last, on the very edge of the white circle of light

shed from the lamp within. The rain again began to fall, the distant thunder again rolled in the mountains, but Isabella did not care; the glass door was half open, the red curtain was withdrawn, she could hear and see, and be neither seen nor heard.

More she did not want.

They sat facing one another; Mrs. Osborne near the door, her stepson opposite it; between them a table covered with papers.

"My dear William," she said, in her most persuasive tones, "you will kill yourself. Remember how positively the doctor has forbidden exertion."

"I have not left my room yet."

"Mental exertion, I mean, and he meant too."

"To write or answer a few insignificant letters cannot be called mental exertion."

He spoke coldly and briefly. She sighed and resumed:

"With regard to that most unfortunate matter, about Robert, if you think that my interference could avail, that my maternal advice and remonstrances would produce any effect—"

"My dear madam, I am obliged to you. But have we not already discussed this matter? When the guilt of Robert is proved to us, let us act by all means. To stir before, would be useless. Nay," he added, with a smile of some irony, "it would be unjust to your son and my brother."

"Heaven knows I do not wish to believe my poor

boy guilty," said Mrs. Osborne, raising her handkerchief to her eyes.

"And what do we know, after all?" pursued Mr. Osborne; "what reports, false perhaps, have told us, or rather you! Prudence, common justice command us not to heed them."

Mrs. Osborne murmured something about his being all consideration, and beaten on this point, she withdrew her handkerchief.

"With regard to that matter about Isabella," she said, "I know not what to say."

"Isabella is a fool," impatiently replied Mr. Osborne, "and she must have her way. For me to interfere would be to expose her and make an éclat. If the Baron never writes more dangerous matter than that absurd letter you showed me—where is the harm? Of course, he will never marry a girl who has not got a farthing in the way of dot; but surely Isabella knows that as well as you and I do. And how can I—in common honesty—assume an alarm and an indignation I do not feel?"

"Then, you decline interfering?"

"I think interference not needed. Isabella's peace of mind is not menaced; in every respect I consider her safe, under your keeping."

"I hope, I trust she is," was the mournful reply; "but I thought that her elder brother—Well—well—" she added, breaking off as she noticed the expression of impatience and ennui that passed over her stepson's face, "I say no more. Isabella must be left to herself. With regard to Robert, I cannot help thinking that my presence might act as a useful

check, and I have come to the resolve of going to England at once."

Mr. Osborne looked neither moved nor surprised. His calm, white face betrayed nothing of what he felt, if indeed he felt anything on hearing this announcement. He merely said :

"Of course, you take my sisters with you?"

Mrs. Osborne looked up at him with a doubtful glance, that seemed to say: "Is there no getting out of that?"

And his quiet look in the same language, replied: "None."

A long pause followed.

"What is she up to now?" thought Isabella, looking at her mother.

Mrs. Osborne sat looking down with a calm fixedness that gave to her fair and handsome face the quiet, intent expression which ancient art has bestowed on Venus fishing. But she soon raised her eyes, and fixing them on Mr. Osborne's face, she said, gently:

"William, before I leave, I must speak to you on a subject of some importance. You will remain alone in this house with a very young girl: Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles."

"What about her?" he sharply asked.

"Nothing, if the subject be displeasing to you."

Mr. Osborne moved restlessly in his chair, and certainly did not look pleased, but he controlled himself and replied:

"Pray go on."

Mrs. Osborne looked in his face with a doubtful,

hesitating expression, that gave more force to her words.

"William, mind I do not put a question, I merely make a remark. If you mean to marry her—"

She stopped short, silenced at once by the indignant severity of her stepson's look.

"You amaze me," he said, frigidly. "I have yet to learn what part of my conduct towards this young girl, a mere child too, has authorized so extraordinary a construction."

"You are angry with me," sweetly said Mrs. Osborne, "yet without cause. Would I have touched on so delicate a subject, but for the poor motherless child's sake! She is young; a mere child, pretty and thoughtless. You have paid her some attention, you have shown her some kindness; she may conclude—"

"That I wish her well," he drily interrupted; and he more drily added, "Allow me to say that she will conclude nothing else."

"She will not imagine that you are attached to her?"

"I think too highly of her penetration, to fear that."

"But what if she should become attached to you herself?" resolutely observed Mrs. Osborne.

Mr. Osborne was too proud to be vain, he was also tolerably sceptical; he did not, and he would not think himself a dangerous man; but unable to suppress a sarcasm, he replied:

"Ah! if I had to deal with one of your oversensitive girls, like Isabella, I should indeed be care-

ful ; but with a flinty little thing, like Mademoiselle Adèle, where is the danger ?”

Mrs. Osborne smiled a slow, sad smile, and with a gentle shake of the head, she said :

“ Well, William, vanity is not one of your faults.”

But the compliment did not mollify Mr. Osborne ; and with a half frown, and a cold, displeased look, he said briefly :

“ My dear Madam, I like and respect Mademoiselle de Courcelles too much to hear any more on this subject.”

Mrs. Osborne rose, and laying her left hand on the table, whilst her right gathered around her the folds of the heavy shawl in which she was wrapped, she said, with a tone, and in an attitude of calm dignity :

“ Excuse me, William ; you must hear more. I cannot let this matter pass thus. Advice, warnings you deride ; facts, whether you believe them or not, you must hear. I spoke in half speech, out of regard to female delicacy—I now speak in plain language. That young girl loves you !”

Mr. Osborne gave an indignant start, and with unusual vehemence he exclaimed :

“ I do not believe it ! It is impossible !”

“ Be it so,” coldly said Mrs. Osborne. “ Forget my words ; I dreamt what I saw and heard. I spoke under the influence of a delusion, of a design if you will. Proofs I certainly will not give ; say if you like, and think too, that I cannot. Let it be. For the first and last time, we have spoken on this subject. Good night.”

She bent her head with stately grace, moved towards a door, and was gone.

"Oh! my mother you are a clever woman," admiringly thought Isabella. "The fate of business, a sister's peace could not bait the fish, vanity, a pretty girl's love will do it."

She drew nearer the glass door and looked in at her brother. He was leaning forward with his brow on his hand; it was contracted with an anxious thought, and he bit his nether lip.

"Ay, she has left him something besides letters and business to think of," murmured Isabella; "let her and let him fall into the miserable trap, into the hollow delusion that a girl of sixteen is dying for a man of thirty. Let him, I say. I liked him; alone I asked nothing from him; and he has repaid my liking with indifference and scorn. I will not utter a word—I will not lift a finger to save him."

She descended the steps, and walked back through the garden, triumphant at all she had heard.

"I will not go to England," thought Isabella, "that's flat; nor yet will I stay here. There's going to be a crash in the business, that is very clear. What need I care? they may think what they like; before it comes I shall be Madame la Baronne."

"It is impossible," thought William Osborne; "I cannot, I will not believe it."

But though it was impossible, though he could not and would not believe it, the words he had heard had left a sting behind, a sting which no hand could pluck away—the sting of doubt and uncertainty.

He liked Adèle—very much did he like her; but from the shadow of any other feeling he was

free. He liked her as a graceful child, fresh, original, and piquant. He liked her own liking for himself, that liking which shone in her dark blue eyes at his approach, which spoke in her joyous laugh, and beamed in her whole aspect. But because he liked those things, in themselves both lovely and innocent, was love, the tormentor of youth—was passion, destroyer of the beauty and freshness of life, to come between them? To both he had long bidden farewell, and of neither did he like to think in conjunction with Adèle; for where love reigns, must vanish the light charm of the child; and though Adèle was pretty, and sixteen, never once had Mr. Osborne thought of her as a woman; never once had he thought of love and her together. It would have seemed cruel to him, cruel and wicked as a profanation; for even as Holiness and Purity surround the Madonnas of Raffaele, spite all their beauty, so around some beings there flows an atmosphere of careless innocence, sweet like that which breathes around childhood or the wild flower; a thing beautiful, indeed, but too tender and too frail to be plucked, and which seems to say to the outstretched hand—"Gather me not."

"It is impossible," he thought again, and impatiently he rose and walked about the room; "and even if it were so," replied an inner voice, "the time of love and faith is for ever gone by for you; let the young love the young, and leave the wearied to rest."

Mrs. Osborne knew well enough that though the thought she had left her stepson might absorb him,

it would lead him to no such dangerous step as marriage. He was the last man to be flattered by the love of a girl of sixteen; he was the last man to allow pity or vanity to delude him. What had he to do with the feelings that agitate only in the spring-time of life? He had loved, been deceived, and this wreck of the lover's fondness and the husband's trust had left him no wish for a third venture. He liked his life as it was, and there seemed to be no room in his heart for the feelings that bind man to woman, and through woman to home.

"I know it is not so," he thought; "but even if it were, is it because I think a flower fresh and beautiful that I must gather it? Let it remain on its stem, let it be worn in the bosom of some happy lover; where love is quick to come, it is quick to depart; but I will never believe it—never."

"May I intrude on Monsieur?" said a submissive voice.

Monsieur Morel stood before him, wet and dripping.

"What news?" asked Mr. Osborne, sitting down.

"I posted the letters Monsieur gave me, and I found none."

"None!—That is odd, is it not, Monsieur Morel?"

Monsieur Morel shrugged his shoulders, and merely said the word "Patience."

"But you posted the two letters I gave you?" resumed Mr. Osborne, after a pause.

"Monsieur gave me three letters," said Monsieur Morel.

"Two you mean."

"Monsieur gave me three letters," persisted the foreman.

Mr. Osborne gave him a fixed look, but said not one word; and taking up his pen, he began to write.

"Two letters, Monsieur Morel," he said, after a pause.

"Monsieur gave me three letters," insisted Monsieur Morel, with a sickly smile.

"And pray what did you do with those three letters?" asked his patron, mistrustfully.

"I posted two, the third I had the misfortune to lose."

"How, and where?"

"In the grotto of the Witch. I had entered it to take refuge from the storm; I opened my pocket-book to feel sure that all was right, and I found the three English letters Monsieur had given me. The rain having ceased, I went on; when I arrived at the post-office of Courcelles, I found that one of the three letters was missing, accordingly I posted the other two."

"Which were they?" interrupted Mr. Osborne.

"One was for Johnson and Co., the other for Walker."

"And the third—the lost one?"

"I did not look at the direction of that letter."

"Why so, Monsieur Morel?—Why exempt that one, when you so accurately noted the other two?"

"Because it was only when the third one was lost that I looked at these two."

"A great pity, Monsieur Morel—a great pity; if you had only examined the letters a little more curi-

ously whilst you were in the grotto of the Witch waiting for the rain to stop, see how useful we might find it now."

A sarcastic smile curled Mr. Osborne's lip as he spoke, and a scornful light shone in his dark eye.

"I beg Monsieur's pardon, 'over and over,'" humbly said the foreman; "I have been remiss, negligent, but how could I suppose that this unfortunate letter would be lost?—And yet, let me see—I think I did look at it—was it not directed to a certain Smith, Farringdon Street, London?"

"Perhaps it was," carelessly replied Mr. Osborne; and internally he added, "fool that I was to trust my fate into the hands of a careless child! She has shown or lost the letter, and all is over." But he was too much master of himself, too well prepared for treachery to betray any emotion; he merely said with a slight touch of bitterness in his voice—

"I wonder, Monsieur Morel, you did not look for that missing letter in the grotto of the Witch on your way back?"

Monsieur Morel opened his eyes wide.

"And does Monsieur suppose I neglected so plain a duty?—Of course I looked for it."

"But did not find it; of course not. Needless question."

"Monsieur is displeased with me," humbly said the foreman; "but let Monsieur remember what a night it has been and is still. Lightning so vivid, and thunder so loud, no one, I suppose, remembers. As for rain," he added, with a shrug, "it is not to boast of my willingness to serve Monsieur that I say

it, but I am wet to the bone. But little would I care for that, if I had not had the misfortune——”

“Let it be,” impatiently interrupted Mr. Osborne; “I know what to think, Monsieur Morel.”

He fixed on his foreman a look of grave sternness, which slightly disturbed the composure of Monsieur Morel.

“And what is more,” resumed Mr. Osborne, but without allowing him to proceed, the foreman observed—

“I beg Monsieur’s pardon, but there is a matter to which I think it right to call Monsieur’s attention. On my return, a little while ago, to the grotto of the Witch, I found, not the lost letter, but this.”

He drew, as he spoke, a small kid glove from the breast-pocket of his great-coat, and laid it on the table. Mr. Osborne looked at it fixedly. A presentiment of coming evil hung over him like a dark cloud, but he did not speak. Monsieur Morel took up the glove, and holding it up for his own survey and that of his master, he resumed, in a slow, cogitating voice—

“It is, as Monsieur sees, a very small woman’s glove, for a small woman’s hand. I found it, as I said, in the grotto of the Witch, on the very edge of that dark hole which I dare say Monsieur remembers; all the painters go and paint it, as if it were a beautiful thing, instead of being a black, ugly pit, without a bottom to it. Well, though that glove is sadly soiled with the wet earth, I could almost swear it is one of the pair I had the honour of bringing Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles two months ago

from Saint Etienne, when I went there for Monsieur's business; but then," added Monsieur Morel, with an incredulous smile, "what should take Mademoiselle Adèle out on such a night as this?"

Mr. Osborne turned deadly pale. The truth flashed across him. Adèle had gone herself with his letter—what had happened to her? He looked at Morel—that sallow face told him nothing; he turned from it with a sickening dread of what might have happened, and rang nervously. Jean, who had come back that same day, soon appeared.

"Where is Mademoiselle Adèle?" asked Mr. Osborne, with unusual vehemence.

"Mademoiselle Adèle!" repeated Jean, hesitatingly. "Is it Mademoiselle Adèle, Monsieur said?"

"Where is she?—Quick—answer."

Jean looked bewildered.

"Monsieur must excuse me, but how can I tell precisely where Mademoiselle Adèle is just now?"

"Is she in the house?—That you know, I suppose."

Jean stared at his master as if he thought that fever had affected his brain, but he controuled himself, and replied—

"Out of the house Mademoiselle Adèle cannot be at this hour; and in her room I will venture to say she is."

"Go and see at once, and bring me word."

Jean bent his head and withdrew slowly. Not a word was exchanged between the master and his foreman until the old man's return. At length, his

shuffling step was heard in the corridor. Slowly and leisurely, with the heavy tread of age, he came along, knocked at the door, opened and shut it carefully, and standing before his master, calmly said—

“Mademoiselle Adèle is in her room.”

“Thank God!” exclaimed Mr. Osborne, breathing like one relieved, “thank God!”

“Are you sure of it? have you seen her?” asked Morel, looking incredulous.

Jean thought the whole of this inquiry strange and impertinent: he was not, at all events, disposed to answer the questions of one whom he despised and disliked. He pretended deafness. But Mr. Osborne had heard Morel’s question, and he anxiously echoed it.

“Ay, Jean, are you sure? have you seen Mademoiselle Adèle?”

“I have not seen Mademoiselle Adèle,” replied Jean, sulkily, “but I have been to Mademoiselle de Courcelles’s room door, and I have seen a light within.”

“Did she speak to you?—did you hear her voice?” impatiently said Mr. Osborne.

“Mademoiselle did not **speak** to me, and I did not hear her voice,” drily replied Jean. “I knocked at her door, but got no answer; Mademoiselle was, I dare say, saying her prayers.”

“Why did you not look in through the keyhole?” asked Morel.

The old man reddened, and gave the foreman a look of silent indignation. Mr. Osborne rose, and half-angrily observed—

"I see there is but one way of knowing the truth." And having cast a rapid look on the table, to ascertain that he left nothing there unfit or unmeant for Morel's eye, he added, briefly and imperatively, in a tone that did not admit of argument or reply—"Jean, show me at once to the room of Mademoiselle Adèle."

Jean shook his head, but obeyed. Master and servant left together. Monsieur Morel remained behind. In a few minutes Mr. Osborne had reached the young girl's room; but the light which Jean had seen, was gone; the door which he had found closed, was open; the room was vacant.

"I suppose Mademoiselle is below," said Jean, doubtfully.

"Go at once, and look," said Mr. Osborne, pacing the narrow room up and down with feverish impatience.

But Jean did not stir.

"Monsieur must excuse me," he said, in a moved voice; "but I cannot go."

"You cannot!" echoed Mr. Osborne, stopping short, and looking at Jean amazed; "why so?"

"I cannot go and leave Monsieur here alone in Mademoiselle de Courcelles's room," solemnly said Jean; "if Monsieur were to kill me for not doing it, I could not do it."

"Jean," emphatically said his master, "you are an old fool; lock the door; take the key; do what you like; but go at once."

But whilst he gave these orders, Mr. Osborne forgot that he was still in the room, and Jean was going

to remind him of the fact, and further delay would have been the consequence, but for the sudden entrance of Jeannette.

"Mademoiselle!" she exclaimed uneasily, "where is Mademoiselle Adèle? Jean, did you see her? where is she?"

"When did you see her last?" hastily asked Mr. Osborne.

"This afternoon; but she must be somewhere!" she added, looking round; "I will never believe the story of that wretch Morel. A vile invention! The dear child never stirred without me before. Jean, run to the lumber-room; there were some old books and pictures there, she used to be fond of looking at. Go at once, I say!" she added, angrily, as Jean, amazed at what he heard, did not stir.

Mr. Osborne took the light from his hand, and went himself. He climbed up a ladder and a broken staircase, but neither books nor pictures had attracted Adèle there that day; the garret was empty. Accompanied by Jeannette, he searched over the whole Manor, but in vain. Adèle was not found.

At once Mr. Osborne's resolve was taken. He called Morel, gave him brief and imperative orders, and before five minutes were over, he rode out to search for Adèle, accompanied by the foreman and five men from the forge.

"I tell you," indignantly exclaimed Jeannette, "that it is of no use; Mamzelle Adèle gone out, indeed! She never did such a thing in all her life; very likely that she should begin on such a night as this! The wicked child has gone to some nook in

the garden, and is hiding there to drive poor old Jeannette out of her wits, and that is all."

She spoke in vain: the evidence of the glove, the tormenting suggestions of his own thoughts, were more convincing than her words to Mr. Osborne. Equally vain proved the interference of Mrs. Osborne. The rumour of the disappearance of Adèle reached her in her room where she sat writing. She hastily descended the staircasé, and found her stepson in the act of riding out. She ventured in the damp, dark night after him, to remonstrate.

"My dear William!" she said, feelingly, "you cannot be thinking of going out on this dreadful night?"

"The storm is over," he replied, shortly.

"But the air is keen, the chill is dangerous! And though I feel and understand your anxiety about this poor child, still remember, William, that your health and life are precious, very precious to us all."

One of the men who preceded the little band held a torch; its light shone on the pale, grave face of Mr. Osborne, and his stepmother could not but notice the bitter smile with which he heard her. But she persisted more feelingly than before.

"What will the doctor say to such imprudence? Why, it may bring on a relapse of that dangerous fever."

"Excuse me," he interrupted; "time is precious. I cannot linger longer."

He rode away. Mrs. Osborne stood on the stone threshold of the Manor, listening to the lessening sound of his horse's hoofs.

"Poor fellow! so soon caught!" she thought, with a scornful pity that avenged her of every past sarcasm.

The night was dark and starless; the wind was keen, but silent; the dull, heavy outline of the mountains rose on a gloomy sky; the road vanished like a pale line traced in dark space; the lake was a sombre spot, a pit silent and fathomless; and Jeannette sat on the stone steps of the Manor, moaning and waiting.

Two hours passed away. At length the tramp of horses was heard; the light of torches flashed on the rocks, dark figures of horses and their riders appeared, but they rode silently, like spectres in legends. Jeannette could not move; she sat there, stony and rigid, until the foremost horseman came up. It was Mr. Osborne; his pale face told all. Jeannette clapped her hands and uttered a loud cry. "Lost—lost!" she moaned. Silently he passed on; Mrs. Osborne, Isabella appeared. Jean groaning aloud, met him on the threshold; he crossed through them, without a word, on to his study. His stepmother had followed him; she arrived in time to hear him lock and bolt the door. She stooped and looked through the keyhole. He stood with contracted brow and rigid lip, looking at the little glove of Adèle on the table.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALICE.

MADAME LASCOURS sat in her luxurious boudoir ; the light of the lamp shone white on her handsome face ; a book lay on her lap, but she did not read ; her cheek rested on her hand, her eyes were fixed on vacant space ; she listened to the wind rushing past, and to the rain beating against the window panes, and she remembered an evening when sitting by the fireside in the Manor, she had listened with William Osborne to that stormy wind passing over the lake.

Monsieur Lascours, a white-haired man with expressive features and quick, brown eyes, sat opposite his wife ; he put down his newspaper with an anxious air.

" You are listening to that wind," he said, perceiving that her book had dropped on her lap ; " yes, it will ruin all our flowers."

" What a pity !" abstractedly said Madame Lascours.

Her husband rose and walked to the window ; he

raised the silk curtain and gazed on the gloom of a stormy night.

"I must go and see what can be done," he observed, impatiently; "a few planks might save them. What do you think, Alice?"

"I think, like you, that something might be done." She spoke with evident effort, and when her husband left the room, she sank back in her chair, and relapsed into her abstracted mood.

"Happy they," she thought, "who can forget the past, who are not for ever haunted by the thought of what is and what might have been. Happy they whose life is a blank, who have nothing to remember save days like other days."

Fiercer grew the night, and louder rose the wind. It blew from the lake, and brought Alice broken sounds of voices, amongst which she distinguished the firm, commanding tones of her husband. Then came the noise of hammering, then a long pause followed. She rose and went to the threshold of the glass door that opened on the garden. The rain had ceased, the wind was still, and a faint star shone through a white cloud. The chill of the night felt pleasant and soothing. Madame Lascours went out, but she shunned the spot where the glare of torches would have led her to her husband and his men. She entered a solitary alley, that wound by the lake. It ended in a stone balcony that overlooked it. Below and around her all was gloom; but through the dark shone a solitary light. It burned in the Manor of Courcelles.

"What brought me here?" thought Alice, turning

away, "what haunts me to-night? What is going to happen, that I cannot find rest?—that if the wind blows loud, I must think of her and of him? He is the last of all men likely to attach himself to a child; and if he did, or does, what is it now to me?"

She turned back; the storm rose again with renewed might; a nameless fear seized her; she sprang on like one pursued, but the wind fled as fast as she did, and rushed by her with a triumphant voice. She stopped short, ashamed of her foolish fear; light shone through the trees; a few steps more brought her to the side of M. Lascours.

"Alice, Alice—why did you come?" he said, in a tone of reproach.

She did not reply. He drew her to his side, with concern. Her loosened hair was heavy with rain; her face was white. She trembled, but did not speak.

"It is a dreary night," he said, "but I have saved some of our flowers."

Mechanically she turned to the spot to which he pointed.

"You have done well," she began; then she broke off and said, in a lower tone, almost a whisper, "what is that?"

Her raised hand pointed to the lake. A dark object was swiftly coming towards them on its heaving waves; and before Monsieur Lascours could reply "it is a boat," the light of the torches had shone on the terrified face of the boatman and the bending figure of a woman. They were drifting fast towards the rocky bank; in another moment their frail skiff

dashed against it; the man sprang on shore, and the dark waves swallowed the splitting boat.

Alice closed her eyes and turned her head away.

"Heaven be praised!" said the boatman, drawing a deep breath—"what a night!"

"And the woman!" exclaimed Monsieur Lascour, "where is the woman?"

"There never was such a night," said the boatman, unable, in the selfish instinct of self-preservation, to think of anything save the danger he had escaped.

Monsieur Lascours no longer heeded him: he had seized a lantern from the hand of a servant, and sprung down the stone steps that led to the lake; but in vain he looked around him; the foaming waves had kept no trace of their prey.

"There!" said his wife, who had followed him.

She pressed his arm, and with her other hand silently pointed to some pale object lying in the rocky bank. He took a step forward, stooped and looked. A white, inanimate girl lay within the shelter of the rocks against which the boat had split. The very force of the shock had thrown her there, beyond the reach of the waves.

"Is she dead, or living?" asked Alice, breathlessly. But before her husband could answer, she uttered a cry of distress and pain. "Adèle! Adèle!—it is Adèle!" she cried; and heedless of the waves that still lashed against the shore, she kneeled down, and seizing the young girl in her arms, she attempted to raise her.

At once Monsieur Lascours put his wife aside.

With the promptitude and energy of his character, he had raised Adèle, called his servants, given them rapid instructions, and carried the young girl to the house in less than five minutes. As he laid her down on a couch in his wife's boudoir, she sighed deeply, and opened her eyes.

Alice raised her up. It was plain that Adèle had only been stunned, with the shock of being cast ashore. The blood soon returned to her pale cheek, and life to her whole aspect; but she looked bewildered, and seemed unable to understand either where she was, or what had brought her there. Alice bent over her friend, and in a moved voice she said—

“You know me,—I am Alice. You are safe, quite safe.”

Adèle looked at her fixedly, and said, slowly—

“The letter is gone.”

Then suddenly she remembered the face of Alice, and uttering her name, she threw her arms around the neck of her friend. But scarcely had she given her one embrace, when a fuller and clearer memory of all that had passed rushed to her. She started, and exclaimed, uneasily—

“Oh! Alice, I must go; they will be so uneasy. I must go at once, at once.”

“Child! you are dreaming. You have but just escaped great danger. You cannot, you shall not go. Why, I cannot even send a message across the lake to let Jeannette know you are here.”

“Poor Jeannette!” said Adèle, leaning her cheek on her hand, “poor Monsieur Osborne! I know

what he will think. It will make him very unhappy, Alice."

She looked up with dim eyes in the face of her friend; but Madame Lascours did not reply. She said, in a tone of concern:

"You are wet, quite wet. Can you come up to my room? or shall Monsieur Lascours carry you?"

Adèle laughed at the question, and started up as if nothing had happened to her. She seemed to remember neither her danger nor her deliverance. She had been out on a stormy night, that was all. Death had passed near her, but invisible had been the spectre on which the eyes of youth so seldom gaze. She had, however, to submit to the kind and anxious control of her friend; and spite entreaties, and reluctance, and assurances that her clothes were barely wet, she had, too, to enter the large and luxurious bed of Madame Lascours's luxurious bed-room.

"I shall stay with you," said Madame Lascours, sitting down by her side; "and as soon as the night grows a little calm, a messenger shall cross the lake."

The assurance pacified Adèle, and with the lightness of her temper, and of her years, she looked around her—vivid carpets, the rarest of woods, costly laces—simplicity in the midst of splendour surrounded her on every side. Her exclamations of admiration and delight drew a sad sigh from her graver friend. What did she care about it all? But Adèle soon changed the theme.

"What a pity you do not come to Courcelles now," she said; "Monsieur Osborne is there now. Oh, how you would like and admire him!"

Madame Lascours did not reply.

"Do you like him so much?" she asked, at length.

"I like him," said Adèle.

"But so very much?" persisted her friend.

"Alice, what do you mean? There are not two ways nor two measures of liking. Monsieur Osborne is perfectly kind and handsome. Alice, I like him—more I cannot say."

Madame Lascours bent her dark eyes on the young face beneath her. Fever and excitement gave the clear cheek of Adèle a vivid glow; her blue eyes shone like stars, her red lips smiled sweetly, her brown hair flowed around her like a veil that showed more than it concealed. She looked very lovely, full of youth, life, and beauty; the very being to charm away an unwary man's heart.

"He loves her, or he will love her," thought Alice, rising as if she had been stung. "It is to be."

"What is the matter?" asked Adèle, leaning up on one elbow and looking surprised. At once Alice came back, resumed her place, and taking the young girl's hand within her own, she patiently sat by her, listening to Monsieur Osborne's praises, until at length Adèle fell fast asleep.

She looked at her with a sad and dreamy gaze.

"What does all this mean?" she thought; "what brought her out on this dreadful night? What letter did she speak of? Why can she not utter ten words without bringing in his name?"

A low tap at the door roused her from these troubled thoughts; she softly stepped across the

floor, opened the door, and saw the anxious face of her husband.

"Well," he said.

"She is well, and fast asleep," replied Alice.

"How does she feel? how does she look?"

Alice did not reply, but with a smile signed him to look in, and held up the light, so that it shone on the young girl's flushed and sleeping face.

Monsieur Lascours was a passionate admirer of handsome women, beautiful girls, lovely flowers, and all splendid things. He turned away, shook his head, and said emphatically—

"Alice, your little friend is a blooming rose. Has she any thorns?" he added, as his wife half closed the door, and followed him out.

"None, I verily believe," replied Alice, with unusual warmth.

"Humph! what brought her out on this awful night? Well, no matter; 'tis her business, not ours. Have you thought of making the foolish little thing's clothes dry?"

For the husband of Alice was a thorough Frenchman, and never forgot the practical.

Madame Lascours replied with a smile, that she would see to everything, and returned to the bedside of the young girl. Adèle was still fast asleep. Alice bent over her, and softly kissed her. "Let it be," she thought, "let it be."

CHAPTER XV.

FRIENDSHIP.

ADÈLE was tired ; she slept without dreaming or wakening until the sun shone full in her room. She awoke with a sense of joy she at first could not understand, but a moment's reflection soon told her. Mr. Osborne's letter was gone. "It is in Dijon now," she thought. "Who knows? in Paris perhaps."

Beyond this she would not go. Morel, his treachery, the lonely road, all she had dreaded and undergone, she banished from her mind : the letter was gone.

She rose, dressed herself quickly, and opened her window. All token of the past night's storm had fled. The vivid green of the mountains rose on the vivid blue of the sky ; the gloom of their rocky base seemed to sink in the very depths of the still, dark lake, and before her rose, in the glow of the morning sun, the verdant gardens and the grey summits of the old Manor of Courcelles.

"So soon up!" said the voice of Alice.

Adèle turned round, behind her stood Madame

Lascours, handsome, grave, richly dressed. She chid her gently for rising so early, then forestalled her inquiries, by informing her that with dawn a messenger had gone over to the Manor, and informed Jeannette of her safety. "And I believe," added Madame Lascours, "that your old friend herself will come for you this morning. But Monsieur Lascours is all anxiety to see you safe and well. Will you come down?"

They found Monsieur Lascours in the dining-room, all anxiety, as his wife had truly said, about Adèle. The kindness and the warmth of his inquiries touched and amused the young girl. She liked his stately mien, his keen brown eyes, and expressive features, even more than on the evening. "Alice is a happy woman," she thought; "if he is so kind to me, a stranger, what must he be to her?"

After breakfast, Monsieur Lascours would show Adèle his garden. It had neither the extent nor the antique charm of that of Courcelles, but in its way it was beautiful; fine trees, alleys where shade and sunshine blended, verdant lawns, splendid flowers adorned it, and picturesque and varied views gave it an extent it did not owe to nature. Adèle admired and praised it enthusiastically.

"Then you prefer my garden to Courcelles?" promptly said Monsieur Lascours.

As promptly came the reply of Adèle.

"No. I like Courcelles better."

Her abrupt frankness seemed to please him, for he looked kindly at her; but he persisted:

"But my garden is much handsomer than that of

Courcelles; you have not seen it yet. Come with me."

He preceded her with a vigorous and rapid pace, which soon made Alice pause with a smile.

"I cannot go so fast," she said; "can you?"

"Ay, and faster," replied Adèle; and lightly springing forward, she again stood by Monsieur Lascours.

"What have you got in Courcelles like this?" he asked, pausing at the entrance of a silent path that wound away through verdure and shade, and closed in a view of mountain and lake seen through azure mists.

"We have better," she resolutely replied; "we have the broad alley, two hundred feet long and thirty feet wide."

"Sunburnt—sunburnt—" he replied, quickly; "but nothing like this have you got," he added, opening the door of a hothouse, and showing her its splendid exotics.

Adèle looked around her and shook her head.

"Your flowers are fine," she said; "but I do not like them. They are shut up from light, life, and air. They are not flowers, but prisoners. Ours bloom in spring and fade in autumn, and are happy and free all the year round."

"Pooh! they bloom on every hedge, and grow in every garden—common, worthless things."

"Ah! bah," coolly replied Adèle. "The Almighty made them, and you cannot say more of yours."

"Are you a republican?" asked Monsieur Lascours, frowning with assumed severity.

Adèle shrugged her shoulders, and said she did not know, but that one flower was as good as another.

Monsieur Lascours was a passionate horticulturist ; he heard her with horror, and, with an abundance of botanical erudition, he clearly proved to her the aristocratic superiority of certain flowers over the rest.

Adèle heard him out, and said with a quiet smile :

" Very true ; but we have something in the garden of Courcelles, all your exotics could not purchase."

" What ?" he quickly asked.

" We have a lime-tree of a hundred and fifty years old, that blooms every first of May, and around that lime-tree an ivy plant that has grown and twined there, Jeannette says, for more than a hundred years."

Madame Lascours once more stood 'by their side. She heard the close of their discourse, and gave her husband an anxious look. His origin was obscure, and his flowers were his hobby ; the reply of Adèle might seem to him little better than an attack on these two sensitive points ; but that reply was uttered so simply, and the whole manner of Adèle was so free from pride of descent or voluntary impertinence, that Monsieur Lascours only smiled and confessed himself beaten.

" You are right, Mademoiselle Adèle," he said. " My garden is but a poor parvenu, and cannot compete with your majestic home."

" Then take me back to it," she said, coaxingly.

He said she was in a great hurry ; but her request was nevertheless complied with. In a few minutes

Adèle had bidden Alice adieu, and a boat with two rowers was carrying her and Monsieur Lascours across the lake.

Alice looked after them and sighed. Where they were going she could not go; the presence they were seeking was to her forbidden; an eternal barrier rose between her and past days, when she too was young, and, though never so gay as Adèle, light-hearted and free.

"But never like her," she thought, as the young girl's clear laugh came to her across the still lake; "never like her. She met death yesterday, and this morning she can laugh. She has known my husband but a day, and she is bolder with him than I after seven years. Ah! some are made to be blest, to seize and enjoy the golden time; and others are made to look on, to know what they should do to be happy, and never do it. The will of God be done."

Rapidly they rowed across the calm lake. Adèle was joyous as a bird, and Monsieur Lascours listened and smiled. Strangely enough, his thoughts took the same turn the thoughts of his wife had taken.

"I am more than three times the little thing's age," he thought; "yet had I married her, I could have made her a happy woman. Alice, I never could. Sad she was on her wedding-day, and sad she will be until I die."

These bitter thoughts sent an involuntary cloud on his brow, and he heard, without heeding, the talk of Adèle, until she suddenly exclaimed:

"There is Monsieur Osborne in his boat. Oh! how wrong of him!"

Monsieur Lascours looked, and did indeed see Mr. Osborne's boat, not rowed by him, however, coming towards them. The old man turned to the young girl.

"Mademoiselle Adèle," he said, in a low, clear voice, bending the while his keen look on her up-raised face, "you are young, very young, and the world is not always kind to the young. You may need a friend to give you aid, to interfere in your behalf; if ever you do need such a friend, apply to me."

Surprise kept Adèle mute. "A friend," she thought, "what should I want a friend for?" And she shook her gay head at life and its trials. But Monsieur Lascours seemed to expect no reply; his boat now stood alongside with Mr. Osborne's; they had exchanged a formal greeting.

"I am much better, thank you," languidly said Mr. Osborne, in reply to Monsieur Lascour's inquiry.

"Ah! but how ill he still looks," put in Adèle, giving him a compassionate glance, which he returned smiling.

No more was said; the two boats rowed on until they reached the stone steps. Adèle lightly sprang out, but Monsieur Lascours did not follow her.

"Good-bye, Mademoiselle Adèle," he said, kindly, "remember my words."

And with a bow to Mr. Osborne, who stood on the lowest step, he sank back in the boat that shot away across the lake. The sunburnt boatman who had rowed Mr. Osborne's boat was tucking up his striped

trowsers to enter the water and fasten the boat to the iron ring that held it, Adèle gave him a rapid look, and bending, she whispered to Mr. Osborne:

"It is gone."

She said no more, but darted up the steps into the alley. He followed her more slowly. When he stood by her side, Adèle again gave a quick, anxious look around her. The spot was secluded, though open; none could approach unseen and listen, yet her voice sank as she said:

"Oh! I have so many things to tell you. The letter is gone, you know. Do not trust Morel; he is a traitor."

"I know it."

"But do not keep him,—not an hour."

He smiled at her earnestness.

"I want him," he said.

"But he is a traitor," she urged.

"It is not the known enemy who is dangerous," he replied.

"Hear me, and then say that if you like," she persisted.

As to hear her was precisely what Mr. Osborne most wished, he yielded and looked down at her like one prepared to listen. We know her tale, and need not repeat it. He interrupted her but once.

"What did you feel when you were in those willows?" he asked.

"I thought that if he saw me he would kill me," she replied.

Mr. Osborne took her hand and pressed it.

"He dare not, even in thought, he dare not harm you. But God forgive me! Go on."

She told him how she had sent the letter. "The rest," she added, simply, "I do not remember well. I got back in the boat. When we reached the middle of the lake there rose a storm that sent us drifting. I remember the dark sky, the white curling waves, the rush of angry waters; then a long blank follows, and the kind, handsome face of Alice, bending over me closes all."

Mr. Osborne dropped her hand.

"Mademoiselle Adèle," he said, "you are a fearless little creature. Truly, you do not belie your old heroic blood."

That blood rushed up, red and burning, to her cheek. He pursued:

"The service you have rendered me I never can repay;—that letter may save me from ruin; it will, at least, prolong a hard battle, and give another chance to victory; it will defeat the treacherous, and teach them that I may be betrayed, but scarcely deceived. To accomplish this, to do me this good work, you have risked your life. Do me the justice to believe I did not contemplate, when I placed the letter in the kind little hand that left its glove in the cave of the Witch, that the shadow of peril could come near you."

"Why do you speak of all this?" she said, smiling; "it is over,—do not think of it."

"Not think of what I never shall forget!" he said, gravely; "excuse me, I must think of it."

"Well, then, do not talk about it; rather let me

tell you a thing I have to say, though I do not know how to say it."

Her dark blue eyes were raised up to his with something between daring and shyness, her red lips quivered with a light, hesitating smile; doubt, desire, eagerness, gave to her whole aspect a grace and a charm, which Mr. Osborne felt so keenly, that he could not help prolonging it there by a longer silence than was needed. At length he said—

"Pray speak."

"If you would let me write letters for you, I would be true, and —— I knew you would laugh at me!" she cried, reddening as she caught the smile he tried to repress. In vain he protested that he was not laughing at her. Adèle persisted: "He thought her foolish, she knew he did."

"On my word, I do not; far from it, Mademoiselle Adèle; the time may even come when I shall remind you of your offer."

"Yes, but you do not accept it now," she said, in a nettled tone; "and yet I could be more useful to you than you think. There are fifty-three stone vases in this alley, and in each vase there grows a rose-tree. Say that there are nine roses, and seven buds on each; how many roses and how many buds for the fifty-three vases?"

Mr. Osborne, surprised, hesitated a little; but Adèle merely laid her finger on her lips and stood still awhile, then she looked up, and said,—

"Four hundred and seventy-seven roses, and three hundred and seventy-one rose-buds."

He looked amazed. She laughed triumphantly.

"That is an easy one. I can answer more difficult questions. Only try me."

"On my word, I shall, some day. But in the meanwhile, I, too, have something to say, for which I must entreat your patient hearing. I liked you the first moment I saw you, Mademoiselle Adèle. I think you, too, like me. Let us be friends—true friends, I mean—friends in liking, confidence, and trust."

"Oh, no! that can never be!" said Adele, looking sagacious,—“it is good; it is like you to say it; but it can never be.”

"Why not?" he asked, surprised.

"Because we should be equal to be what you say; and you know very well that you are worth ten like me."

Free, undisguised, was the admiration of the imprudent girl; but though it was warm, it was not tender, and did not disturb or alarm its object.

"Indeed," he said, "I am not going to grant that. There is not one man, Mademoiselle Adèle," he added, lightly touching her cheek, "who could stand before Almighty God by the side of a good and innocent little girl like you."

"Oh! you will make me feel hot again," said Adèle, turning very red; "I am not used to it, and I do not like it."

"I have taken the liberty of praising you for the first and last time," he said; "yet allow me a few more words. I overheard Monsieur Lascours's offer. I trust that before you apply to him in any necessity, you will remember me."

"Oh! yes!" she cried, very willingly; "I know you longer, and I like you better."

The warning of his stepmother rushed back to his mind; but the fearless innocence of the young face on which he gazed, sent it back like a dark spirit into the depths of its native night. Suddenly he started, though slightly. He had heard a heavy tread.

"Monsieur Morel is coming," he said.

"I will not look at the traitor," she cried, "I will not."

She ran off angry and indignant, whilst Mr. Osborne calmly awaited the approach of his treacherous foreman.

Even as she ran, Adèle wondered within herself at Mr. Osborne. How could he wish to be friends with her? M. Lascours she would not have minded; but Mr. Osborne she wished to worship, and adore, and admire "like a star."

CHAPTER XVI.

JEANNETTE'S YOUNG MASTER.

"WILL that perverse child never come?" indignantly exclaimed Jeannette.

She had not time to say more; a pair of young arms was twined around her neck, warm and ardent lips were pressed on her cheek, and a laughing face looked up into hers.

Jeannette laughed, then cried, then scolded, and finally holding out her young mistress at arm's length, she began a series of questions. "What had taken her out?—What had kept her out?—Why had she never said to Jeannette that she was going out?"

Adèle had found her old friend in the bare stone room where she usually sat; the window was open; the joyous morning sun came in; it fell on Jeannette's wheel standing idle in a corner.

"Jeannette," solemnly said Adèle, "you might as well ask that wheel there to answer you, as to ask me. I cannot—I will not."

Jeannette's arms dropped by her side, her lips parted with amazement, then closed again. Adèle

had looked so resolutely and so proudly in her face, that Jeannette felt silenced.

"Does Mademoiselle want anything from me?" she asked, in a subdued voice.

"Nothing, Jeannette, thank you," replied Adèle, again speaking lightly, "save the news of all that happened whilst I was away."

"Nothing happened," shortly, said Jeannette; "Mademoiselle was missing, and Monsieur Morel picked up her glove, and Monsieur Osborne went out with five men to look for her."

"He went out to look for me!" cried Adèle, with a start; "ah, he did not tell me that. How wrong, how very wrong of him, ill as he still looks; and how kind," she added, in a low, moved tone.

"She has already seen him," thought Jeannette, and internally she commented on the fact. Aloud she merely observed—

"Louise went this morning; Monsieur Jean pretends to be very glad of it; but he is very much mistaken if he thinks I care a pin. Madame Osborne and her daughters are going away this evening, I believe; a good riddance of the lot, say I."

"Where are they going?" asked Adèle.

"I do not trouble myself with the concerns of other people," shortly, said Jeannette; "no one has told me, and I have asked no one."

"But Monsieur Osborne is not going, is he?" cried Adèle, struck with the possibility of the fact.

"I cannot say; but I should not think it unlikely."

"No, no, Jeannette, he is not going,—he is too ill still. Besides, he would have told me."

"Why so?" sharply said Jeannette; "Mademoiselle does not tell me, her old, faithful servant, when she means to take a walk. Why should Monsieur Osborne tell Mademoiselle, whom he only knows a few weeks, when he means to take a journey?"

Adèle reddened, and looked very much provoked.

"Good bye to you, Jeannette," she said, darting towards the door; "you are too cross this morning."

"No, no, Mademoiselle, do not go," said Jeannette, with tears in her eyes, "and do not be angry with me."

"But why cannot I mention Monsieur Osborne's name without your saying something unpleasant?" asked Adèle, still by the door, and pouting a little.

Jeannette looked very earnestly at her pretty little mistress.

"I have been forty years and more in the family," she said, with a sigh. "I think I have won the right of plain speech; and once for all, whether it please Mademoiselle or not, I will speak plainly. It has been on my mind since the first day, and it must come out. For the sake of all my faithful services, I ask but one thing of Mademoiselle—to listen to an old story."

Adèle detested Jeannette's old stories; but her naturally kind heart and gentle temper prevailed. A little impatiently she shook her head; but she subdued the feeling, left the door, took a stool, and sat down at Jeannette's feet, prepared to listen.

"I never told it to any one," said Jeannette, folding her hands on her knees, "I never thought to tell it; there's many an old tale like this that goes down to the grave locked in an old heart like mine, and which the sneering world knows nothing about. When the cheek is blooming and the hair is black, all right and good; but when the brow is wrinkled and the head is white, it is like raking up ashes after a fire is dead and cold."

Adèle looked up surprised. She had expected to hear, "When Louis the Cruel was Lord of Courcelles," with a prolix and horrifying account of the family crimes in which Jeannette took so much pride; but different was Jeannette's prelude, and different was Jeannette's tale.

"I was twenty," said Jeannette, "when I went out to service in Normandy. To a fine old château I went, to wait on my lady, a widow, who was always ill and languid. There was my young master, too, the Count, just turned sixteen, as tall as Monsieur Osborne, and twice as handsome, but I had nothing to do with him. My lady was fond of me, and kept me about her. She worked, my young master read aloud, and I stood behind her chair and listened. I did not understand half of what he read, and my legs were sadly tired with the standing, but never in my life was I so happy as I was then, standing behind the chair of Madame."

"You were very fond of her," said Adèle.

Jeannette sighed and shook her head.

"Yes, yes," she said, "for she was kind, and so was my young master. If he met me in the orchard

—and somehow or other we often met there—he would pluck the finest fruit, and give it to me with his own hand. If he went to the fair, he brought me back the finest ribbons money could get. If he came down to the broad place where the elms grew, to dance there with the village girls,—I tell no untruth when I say that he danced twice as often with me as with any other. He had a way, too, of smiling in my face with his handsome blue eyes, and of calling me ‘Petite Jeannette,’ that went to my very heart. To serve him I would have gone through fire: I would have laid down and made a footstool of myself, if it could have pleased my young master.”

“And were you fonder of him than of your mistress?” said Adèle.

Jeannette looked in her eyes, and smiled.

“A little,” she replied; “but it was no wonder. He was so kind. I did not know how to read; nothing would do but he should teach me. I hated learning; but what would I not have done to please my dear young master? Little he guessed, when he called me a clever girl in the morning, that I had sat up half the night studying alone. Unluckily for me, he was called away to his regiment—he was Colonel in the Queen’s Musqueteers—before I knew how to read; so that I have remained where he left me,—that is to say, I can spell, long words excepted.

Madame had long been ailing, and at length she died. Her son was with her. Night and day had he ridden to see her again, and receive her blessing. He came back from the funeral pale as death, and entering the room where I was crying alone, a room

just like this, he threw his arm around my waist, laid his head on my shoulder, and said—

“ ‘ You loved her, Jeannette,’ and he cried like a child as he was, for seventeen he had not yet seen. Well, I loved him like my life, and the sight of his grief made me half mad. I forget what I said, but how can I ever forget what I did ? I took his head in both my hands, and I kissed him again and again. I was not a servant then ; he was not the count, my young master, but I was a woman ; I loved him, and he was in trouble ; he grew red, and I remembered all. I threw myself at his feet. I said I would go that day. I asked him to forgive me.

“ ‘ Forgive you, Jeannette, for being fond of me !’ said my young master ; ‘ what shall I do to my enemies ?’ He raised me, kissed me of his own accord, and did not leave me until I had promised never to forsake him. ‘ My mother died in your faithful arms, Jeannette,’ he said, ‘ and I want to die there too.’ Alas ! alas ! I little thought that as he said, so it would be.

“ Well, time passed. My young master got over his grief, and came and went. He took little notice of me ; but now and then, when he met me in the hall or on the staircase, his blue eyes would look at me in the old way, and in his pleasant voice, he would say, ‘ Petite Jeannette.’ More he could not well do, without bringing scandal and suspicion on me ; for he was a man, and I was still young ; and—I may speak of those things now—I had been a pretty girl, and I was reckoned a prettier woman.

“ Well, whether he was there or not, I was every-

thing in the château, and eight years had I been in it in all, when, on a fine summer morning, I met my young master riding out. He was twenty-four then, the handsomest of men. He wore a blue coat laced with gold, and white satin waistcoat, a lace cravat, and a black cocked hat, with just a sprinkling of powder on his yellow hair ; and he rode a milk-white horse, whose eyes shone like fire, and whose coat was bright as satin. I looked at my young master, dazzled as if I had seen him for the first time ; so gallant was his mien, so sweet and noble his handsome face. ' Petite Jeannette,' he said, ' wish me good luck.' His voice was so soft, his look was so kind, that my very heart was stirred ; and almost without knowing what I said, I answered—' May Monsieur le Comte ever succeed in his wishes !' I saw him again that day ; he had just returned, and he was coming up the staircase as I went down. He did a thing he had never done since the day of his mother's funeral ; he threw his arms around my neck, and kissing me on both cheeks, he said, ' Wish me joy, Jeannette ; in a week you shall have a new mistress.' Ah, well, Mademoiselle may laugh at me, and think I was but a fool, but if his arms had not been about me, I should have fallen. But it did not last ; I had known all along that it would come to that ; so I curtsied to my master, and I smiled bravely in his face, and said—' I wish Monsieur le Comte joy.' And I went away, and told all the servants how happy I was to have a new mistress, until I could get to my own room ; and there—there I cried as if my heart would break."

" Poor Jeannette !" softly said Adèle.

"Yes, Mamzelle ; poor Jeannette ! and yet how many would tell you : 'she may thank herself for it all ?' But you see I had not meant to be so fond of him ; one never means those things, they come unawares ; and then he was so kind, that the mischief was done before I well knew how. Why had I eyes to see that he was handsome ? or, rather, why had I a heart to feel that he was kind ? Well, well, no matter ; everything was as it should be. I felt it, I said it, and I bore it, but it was hard. Well, the day of the wedding came, and I had to see to everything, of course."

"You !" exclaimed Adèle.

"And does Mademoiselle think I could have let any one else prepare a thing for my young master's wedding-day ?" asked Jeannette, with some pride. "No, no, I loved him dearly, oh, very dearly ! but he was still my master, and I was Jeannette, his faithful servant-woman. I gathered flowers for the dinner-table. I put the velvet cushion in the chapel where the bride was to kneel on the morning after her wedding ; and I smoothed, with my own hands, the pillow trimmed with lace on which her head was to rest beneath my master's roof ; and as I did it, I prayed—and I prayed all the better for the fulness of my poor heart—I prayed that my master's wife might ever be blest and beloved.—Beloved !—ah, when I saw her, I felt that beloved she must ever be. She was little, very little, spite her red, high heels, and barely fifteen, but so beautiful, so white, so fair, though her hair and her eyes were black, that she looked like a fairy. I overheard some one saying

that in all France there was not another like her ; and I believed it, and wished it so. Who had so good a right as my young master to the most beautiful wife ? And I will tell Mademoiselle an odd thing—I was very wretched on the wedding-day of my young master, and yet I was very happy ; for as it was I who had provided and arranged everything ; so every time his young wife looked pleased, he smiled at me if I was there ; and I was glad and miserable in a breath. Well, well, it seems but folly to be raking up such old things. I got over my grief with time. The young Countess, though a little impatient—she had been a spoiled child—was kind to me, and I learned to love her dearly, but never as I had loved my young master.”

She paused. Adèle had heard her with eager interest, and eagerly she asked—

“ Who was he, Jeannette ? What was his name ? ”

A sad smile stole over the old woman’s face.

“ Mademoiselle would laugh, if I were to tell her,” she said.

“ Laugh ! No, indeed, Jeannette. Do tell me.”

“ Mademoiselle’s mother was from Normandy,” said Jeannette. “ I wonder if Mademoiselle can guess whose daughter her mother was, and why old Jeannette thinks there is not such another pair of blue eyes as those of Mademoiselle Adèle.”

The blue eyes of Mademoiselle Adèle opened wide.

“ My grandfather ! ” she exclaimed ; “ it was my grandfather, Jeannette.”

“ Alas, yes,” sighed Jeannette. “ My young

master was the grandfather of Mademoiselle, whom I received in my arms at her birth, as I had received her mother before her. I dare say Mademoiselle thinks it very strange that a poor girl like me should have ventured to think of a great gentleman."

"No, no, Jeannette; but my old grandfather!"

"Old! he was not old. I am old and withered, and a generation and more has come and passed away since the things I speak of happened; but age never withered him. He was not thirty when he died, and he was as handsome as when, standing behind his mother's chair, I wondered in my foolish heart if the world held another like him. He died too, as he had wished to die, in my arms; for, alas! his poor little wife was giving birth in the next room to a child which its father never saw and never blessed."

"Oh! Jeannette, what a strange, sad story!" said Adèle, clasping her hands around her knees and looking up wistfully in the old woman's face.

"I wonder what Mademoiselle would say if she knew the whole of it!" exclaimed Jeannette, with a sigh.

"Why, what else is there?" asked Adèle, surprised.

"I never thought to tell *that* to any one; but I have told you the rest—as well may I tell that too. And, perhaps, Mademoiselle, that will teach and show you more than all I have yet said:—It was the day before my young master died; I was alone with him and handing him a drink. As he took it from my hand he looked me full in the face, and said: 'You

have been very fond of me, Jeannette.' 'I have always been Monsieur le Comte's faithful servant,' I replied. 'I say that you have been very fond of me,' he said again, 'and you know what I mean.' I did know it well enough, and though I was a girl no longer, though that foolish time was over, I was still a woman, and my poor face felt all on fire. My young master said again: 'Do not think I did not see it—do not think I did not care for it; the truth is, Jeannette,' he said, speaking quite warmly, 'that I was much too fond of you myself to wish to bring you to shame.' A word I could not answer; my legs shook under me. After all, he had liked me. Oh! never—never as I had loved him! but still he had liked me—as a young man likes a pretty girl, with rosy cheeks and black eyes; but still he had liked me. My young master sighed, and said again:—'Jeannette, I am dying, and the dark days are coming—the revolution was brooding'—and I must leave a poor little wife and child to God alone knows what fate. Jeannette, never forsake them—though the whole world should abandon them, be true to them as you have been true to me. The people will rise against their masters and take sore vengeance for the past; the servant will betray the hand that gave it bread; but you, Jeannette, oh! you will never forget that you have been dear to your master's heart, and sacred as any lady to your master's honour.' He sank back quite tired. I knelt down by his bed, and I kissed the hand of the noble gentleman who had scorned to tempt to sin a fond and foolish girl, a poor peasant's daughter. I vowed, that as I had loved

him, I would love his wife, his child, and the children of his child, if I lived to see them. And have I not kept that vow?" cried Jeannette, breaking into passionate sobs and tears. "His little wife had been the darling of his heart—did she not become the darling of mine. When she lost home and fortune in the Terror, did I not work for her and her baby? Let her tell him in the next world, where she so soon followed him, let her tell him if, whilst she lived, Jeannette ever suffered toil and labour to stain the little white hand he had been so fond of kissing."

Jeannette ceased; a long pause followed; when the old woman spoke again it was in a wholly altered tone.

"Does Mademoiselle know," she said sadly and gravely, "why I have told her so old a story?"

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE.

ADÈLE looked up like one wakening from a dream, and said quietly :

“ No, Jeannette. I do not know—why was it ?”

The natural question seemed to embarrass Jeannette considerably ; nevertheless she said :

“ Mademoiselle may see that what undid me was my master’s kindness. Had he not been so kind he might have been the handsomest of handsome gentlemen, and I would not have cared for him—not otherwise at least than as my master.”

“ Of course not,” replied Adèle.

“ But kindness—does Mademoiselle know what kindness can do ? It melts a heart, as the spring sun thaws snow ; it makes the strong one weak as a little child.”

Adèle smiled at something in her own thoughts, and said, softly :

“ Yes, Jeannette, kindness is sweet and warm as the warm sun.”

"And the sun is good for age and dangerous to youth," said Jeannette, looking troubled. "Oh! it will not do for girls to whom gentlemen are kind, to think too much about that kindness. Who would not like to look at a girl of sixteen, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, dark hair, and a face as bright as that of the morning? But to look is not to love! Who would not be kind to a little thing that never harmed a fly, that runs about like a kid, that plays like a kitten and sings like a bird, and laughs so sweetly, that one can never tell which is most pleasant to listen to; her laugh or her song! But, oh! that kindness of a gentleman to a child is not the love of a man for a woman."

The red lips of Adèle parted; her blue eyes opened with amazement.

"And then," sadly pursued Jeannette, without looking at her, "the liking of some men—ay, and of the best—is often a strange thing. For your all they will give back a little, and stop there. Love you they cannot; that time is not yet come for them, or it is gone by. Marry you they will not, you are too young or too poor; but a little through vanity—God help us, we are all weak!—a little through blindness, a little because they do not know the mischief they are doing, they let you love, and when they marry some one else, or go off with themselves, and never return, they are very sorry for you. But why were you so foolish or so fond?"

Adèle started to her feet, red like a crimson flower. "Hush, Jeannette," she cried, "hush! no more!"

And springing through the door, she vanished.

"Too late!" groaned Jeannette; "I should have spoken before—too late!"

Light as a bird, Adèle ran down an alley; she paused breathless on reaching her usual place of refuge, the statue of silence in the maze; she sat down on the stone step, and burying her burning face in her hands, she questioned her beating heart. "Am I in love with Monsieur Osborne?" she asked, trembling.

"Of course you are," was the pitiless reply; "you are so fond of him that you can think of nothing and no one else; that Jeannette sees it, that *he* sees it, and laughs at you." "No, no, I am sure he does not," she answered, indignantly; "and really," she added, looking up half-angrily, "I do not think I am in love with him, after all. I am sure I am not. I feel, I know I should not like to marry him—oh, no, not at all!" she thought, reddening, and feeling uneasy at the thought, though alone; "but I should like him to marry some one else; I should be glad to see him look happier than he does sometimes. Ah, if Alice were only single—not a widow—I cannot wish poor Monsieur Lascours to die—how I should like him to know, love, and marry her. How happy I should feel to live here with them both."

And for a moment she saw a strange vision, keen, distinct as a thing she had seen or was to see. They stood in the Hall of the Manor, Mr. Osborne and Alice; her eyes were raised to his, as his were bent to hers; children grew around them; Adèle saw

"Their unborn faces shine
Beside the never-lighted fire."

And, starting at the vividness of her dreams, she beheld, not Alice, nor Mr. Osborne, but Mrs. Osborne, who stood looking at her with an expression of mingled pleasure and tenderness on her fair face.

"My dear, dear child!" she said, extending her white hand, and speaking in her kindest voice,—
"how happy I feel to see you once more safe. Oh, the anxiety, the terror of last night were dreadful—dreadful to us all."

Mechanically, Adèle had risen, and laid her hand in that of the lady; but on hearing this remark, she half withdrew it, and looked mistrustful. She expected open questions or a covert interrogatory; for what other purpose could Mrs. Osborne be seeking her now? But Adèle was mistaken; guiltless of such intentions was the cautious lady. Why put imprudent questions when she all but knew? She pursued—

"My dear son William was like a madman. In vain I entreated him to remember his recent illness. He could not heed advice, remonstrances, or entreaties; but indeed we were all distracted."

Adèle looked troubled.

"I was very sorry indeed," she said, "very sorry to learn that Monsieur Osborne had gone out to look for me. It never occurred to me that he would do such a thing."

"Because you do not know him," said Mrs. Osborne, with a sad smile; "knowing him, you would wonder at nothing. He is the best, the most generous, the noblest of men," she added, in a low, measured voice. "What I and my dear children would

do without him now," she added, raising her handkerchief to her eyes, "heaven alone knows."

Youth is credulous and true. Adèle was touched. Madame Osborne was a good lady, and very fond of her stepson. She drew a step nearer to her, and looked in her face with a friendly look. The handkerchief was withdrawn; the pale blue eyes were fixed on hers; the thin and delicate though handsome mouth smiled sweetly.

"You are a dear little thing!" she said; and she really thought and meant it. She never had had a particle of feminine jealousy in her life; and handsome herself, she had always liked the beauty of other women.

"And a good little thing," she added, after a pause; "I am sure I can trust in you, that I can speak openly, that you will keep my secret."

The word secret startled Adèle.

"No, no, pray tell me nothing!" she exclaimed, "I detest secrets."

Mrs. Osborne smiled, amused.

"My dear child, this is scarcely a secret," she said; "all I wish you is not to tell my son William."

"No, no," interrupted Adèle, "I will not hear it; tell me nothing I am not to tell him."

"Well, then, tell him if you please!" persisted Mrs. Osborne, "I hope you will not; indeed, I feel sure you will not; he would not thank me for my interference; and the sad breach, already too deep, would be widened; but I lay no restriction on you—none; you may speak or not, at your pleasure. All I ask of you is to hear me."

Adèle looked perturbed, and said she would rather hear nothing. But Mrs. Osborne was resolute.

"My dear child, you must," she said, assuming the gentle authority of her years; "you are not more reluctant to hear than I to speak; but I leave to-night,—I cannot choose—speak I must, and plainly, too."

Adèle submitted.

"I will be brief," said Mrs. Osborne; "indeed, I have little to say. You know William, but you cannot know, as I do, all his virtues, and, alas! his faults, too. He is good, generous, proud, sensitive, honourable to folly; easily offended, not easily reconciled; a little ironical, a little sarcastic, but kind; above all, ever and under every circumstance, honourable."

The portrait, though rapidly sketched, was like, and it struck and interested Adèle by its likeness. This Mrs. Osborne saw, and she pursued—

"Such he is to those that know him thoroughly. For the world he acts the part of a peculiar and handsome man, fitful and restless, who travels and sketches, and casts away to idleness high qualities and rare gifts. And that is true too," added Mrs. Osborne; "but there is something else which the world cannot guess, which his dearest friends do not suspect, which he himself knows not, which I alone have fathomed. William has been disappointed in love, and unhappy in marriage, but his heart is ardent, his feelings are deep; his sense of the beautiful is painfully keen; none, save a lovely woman, can he love;" and her he will love with idolatrous

affection, Mrs. Osborne would have added, but Adèle did not give her time.


"No, no, I will not hear any more," she cried, stopping her ears, "Monsieur Osborne would not like me to know about his feelings, light or deep, and I do not want to know what he can wish none, save God Almighty, to know," she added, withdrawing her fingers from her ears, and looking a little haughtily in Mrs. Osborne's face. A red spot rose to the lady's brow, but she laughed lightly.

"You are a loyal little creature," she said, gaily; "well, I will not say what I meant to say; I will but add an entreaty which your true, kind heart will not refuse to gratify—I went last night to your room for that purpose. By the way, my dear, why do you not have a better room than that little cupboard?"

"I like my room," shortly, said Adèle; "besides, I am nothing in this house—Monsieur Osborne is master."

Mrs. Osborne laid her hand on the young girl's shoulder, smiled in her face, and opened her lips to say something which—like one who thinks better of it—she did not say.

"True, true," she assented, gravely; "well, I will be brief. An unhappy division has sprung between my son Robert and my dear son William." She paused, but Adèle made no remark. Mrs. Osborne sighed and resumed. "All the blame lies on my poor boy's side. I have advised him to throw himself on his elder brother's mercy; I have got no answer; I am going to England at once to try the



effect of my presence ; but, alas ! it may happen that Robert will have already left. I cannot think, without terror, of a meeting between him and William there in my absence."

"Ah, but Monsieur Osborne is so good," exclaimed Adèle.

"He is ; but he has been injured in the most sensitive points—his confidence, which has been betrayed ; his honour, which has been perilled. Oh, my child ! my dear child !" she added, seizing the two hands of Adèle, and speaking with sudden fervour, "promise me that if my poor boy comes in his mother's absence, you will be his good angel ; that your prayers——"

"Oh, Madame !" cried Adèle, alarmed at the turn her remarks were taking, "how could I interfere ?—Monsieur Osborne would be too kind to laugh at me, but——"

"Laugh at *you* !" interrupted Mrs. Osborne, "at *you*, whom he holds so dear !"

"He does not—he does not," said Adèle, red and indignant ; "it would be shameful folly ; and he is good, and wise as he is good."

"You underrate your own merits," said Mrs. Osborne, ironically.

Adèle looked her in the face, and tapped her foot indignantly.

"I think the whole world is going mad about love," she said, with an amazement that had something comic. "Jeannette thinks I like him too much, and you think him, the word will out, in love with me ! One is just as true as is the other," she added, very

scornfully. "What!" she continued with angry tears, "I cannot like and admire a good and admirable gentleman, but I am thought immodest? what! he cannot show kindness to a friendless girl, but he is thought foolish? Ah! Madame, what do you know of him after all?" She did not wait for the reply, but walked out of the maze.

"Mademoiselle de Courcelles is blunt," thought Mrs. Osborne, not much pleased with the brusquerie of the young girl, nor yet with that intuitive sense of truth which so promptly defeated her.

Adèle walked back to Jeannette's room. The old woman gave her a doubtful look, half-beseeching forgiveness. The bright blue eyes that so often reminded her of her young master, looked kindly on Jeannette; with a touch of childish dignity the young girl said:

"I am not angry, Jeannette; but you must learn to know me better. I like him, but not as the princesses like the princes in Fairy tales; not at all. I could look in his face any day as I look into yours now, Jeannette."

Jeannette looked at her little mistress; the face of Adèle was calm and smiling, and the clearness of the brow, the serenity of the look told of maiden peace undisturbed, and told it in language too convincing not to be believed. Jeannette breathed relieved.

"But, Mademoiselle," she observed, hesitatingly, "you must still be careful; if the gentleman should think——"

Adèle turned on her with sparkling eyes.

“Never say that again,” she cried, angrily;
“never—never.”

That same day, Mrs. Osborne, her daughters and
her servants, left the Manor of Courcelles.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALCESTIS.

Who is it that thinks a country life dull? Who can dread the stillness and the stagnation of its solitude? Vain thought, and vainer dread. Life does not make us, we make life. What we have to spend, must we not spend, be the object what and where it will? A country life is full of events, for a magician's wand changes the most trifling incident into a thing of delight or into a portentous disaster. It is pregnant with emotions rapid and stormy, for in its peaceful air passion broods like a thunder-cloud, and in its stillness and solitude the heart listens to strange voices lost in the tumult of the city. Treacherous, therefore, like sleeping waters, is the repose that seems so sweet to the unwary; perfidious the puerile pleasure which they take in childish things. But such serious considerations did not alarm Mr. Osborne. Perhaps, because he felt secure, perhaps because there is a spirit of opposition from which the best are not exempt, he seemed determined

to justify the forewarnings of Mrs. Osborne and the suspicions of Jeannette.

The autumn was beautiful and still; the sun was warm, the loud winds were at rest; white mists floated over the mountains in the morning, but they melted away in the noonday glow, and bright and burning looked in the setting sun the withering oaks that climbed the mountain side; at night the moon shone full and clear above the lake.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughters stayed away; they were in Paris, and so were the De Launays; Mademoiselle de Janson seemed to have gone away with the departing world; the master of the house and the little girl, whose inheritance he possessed, alone remained in Courcelles, and spite of warnings, spite perhaps of prudence, they were seldom apart.

The Manor was large, and its old garden was larger; why, then, should one spot of Manor or garden ever hold these two? Yet thus it was. Where she was he soon appeared, and from where he was, Adèle did not long remain absent. True, they were never alone, for Jeannette lurked around them like an uneasy spirit; but why should a handsome and agreeable man of thirty, and a pretty half wild girl of sixteen be so much together?

Yet there seemed no real cause for uneasiness. She was pretty, and he liked beauty; she was merry, and she amused him; she was natural, and she pleased his taste. What of it?—And what of it with regard to Adèle? He was kind, he lent her books, he read to her, he taught her drawing, and finally,

he told her wonderful tales of the world of which she was ignorant, of lands which she could never hope to see. Why, then, should she not like to walk with him down the broad alley, or to sit with him in the sunny orchard, or even to haunt his study like a busy elf? His look had never yet told her that she was not welcome there; far from it—it had ever held another language. But for all that, Jeannette was uneasy. She “did not like it,—it would not end well; no, no, it would not.” She watched incessantly; night and day her ears were open to hear, her eyes to see; they heard, they saw nothing, save gay and innocent speeches, save free and fearless looks. The world, indeed, might have misconstrued both, for the world has such sharp eyes, that it can see anything. But its suspicions, its blame, could not reach Mr. Osborne and his little friend. The world had not even a foot in the Manor of Courcelles. Jean watched like a dragon at the stone gate; M. Morel had been forbidden the garden. The fondest, the most jealous of lovers could not have wished to possess his mistress in a more perfect solitude than that in which Mr. Osborne enjoyed the society of Adèle.

That he really enjoyed it, that he was fond of her, were two facts very apparent to Jeannette; yet he was not in love, that she saw too. No, it was not love; Mr. Osborne had been in love before, and what he now felt he had not experienced since his boyish days: this was friendship, sweet as honey, pure as dew; his first strong, warm affection as a man. There was goodness in him, but tempered by

mistrust. Thus his good will had shone on all, broad, full, impartial, like the sun at noon. He had had inveterate dislikes and some aversions, but no preferences until he met with this little girl, and for her he conceived and cherished a true and cordial feeling, perhaps because in her he could believe entirely. "If he would only not be always after her," groaned Jeannette. But Mr. Osborne had no idea of laying himself under such restraint. Thus, he no sooner discovered that every Sunday morning Adèle and Jeannette went up to a little church in the mountains, than he deserted the parochial church of Nantua to frequent the same little temple, at the same hour. He did not go or return with them; but half way down the wild and solitary path, they found him sitting, waiting for Adèle; as he said it himself, there could be no doubt about it. If he liked it, so did she. She liked to take his arm and walk down the narrow path with him, whilst Jeannette followed behind. She liked to hear him talk of religion, as he often talked to her; it pleased him to speak, her faith was so fervent, so naïve; it pleased her to listen, his views were so broad, so large, so happy. "Oh, Jeannette," she often said, "I feel good when he talks to me so. His looks, his voice, his words, convince; persuasion falls from his lips like the pearls and roses from the lips of the good girl in the fairy tale."

"Mademoiselle," began Jeannette, who knew well enough that love is never more dangerous than when he puts on a pious cloak.

"I tell you he should have been a Priest," pur-

sued Adèle; "he laughed this morning because I told him so, but he should. Oh, why is he not a Bishop, a Missionary, a Martyr?"

This rather comforted Jeannette.

"A Bishop!" she thought; "there never will be any making out that girl."

She was meditating, however, how best she might put a stop to these delightful Sunday walks, when a much more alarming attempt was made by Mr. Osborne.

He had just then little to do. He was fond of boating; he liked to row idly on the lake, and linger there for hours. Adèle would have liked it too, but she virtuously resisted all his invitations, until one day, the temptation proving too strong, she said, "Yes, that she would go with him to-morrow."

Great was Jeannette's dismay on hearing of this, She did not argue with Adèle, she went straight to Mr. Osborne and boldly remonstrated with him, and pathetically entreated him not to insist. Mr. Osborne was annoyed, but he was not offended.

"Mademoiselle Adèle is a mere child," he said; "and no man of my age could think of her otherwise than as a child without folly. She looks, too, more childish than she is; and the world must be both wicked and mad to have a thought of harm. Besides, you will accompany her, of course." He did not add that this first invitation should also be his last; but his manner convinced Jeannette that he meant as much, and comforting herself as well as she could, she submitted. With her little mistress she did not attempt to remonstrate. Adèle was very amiable whilst she

could have her way; but Adèle was apt to be sharp and imperious when she was contradicted; and Mr. Osborne was a very sensitive subject with the young girl. Any allusion to him and love, sent the blood up to her cheek, and an angry light to her eyes. Jeannette was therefore satisfied with inquiring where Monsieur Osborne was to take Mademoiselle?

"I am to choose between the Roche aux Fées and Saint Magloire," replied Adèle, in great glee. "Is it not delightful?"

"For Heaven's sake, Mademoiselle, do not go with Monsieur Osborne to the Roche aux Fées!" exclaimed Jeannette, much alarmed.

Adèle opened her eyes, and asked why so? but more urgently than before, Jeannette repeated—"Oh, do not go with Monsieur Osborne to the Roche aux Fées."

"Indeed, then, I will, Jeannette, unless you give me a good reason against it."

"Ah, Mademoiselle," groaned Jeannette, "is it possible you do not know the story of that place? but if you did, you would never dream of going—never!" added Jeannette, shutting her eyes and groaning again.

The curiosity of Adèle was roused; she insisted upon knowing this singular history, and at length Jeannette spoke.

"The very name of the Roche aux Fées," she said, "shows that it is not a place to go to; the fairies have been there since the world was made, and they will be there to the end of time."

"There are no fairies," said Adèle.

"Mademoiselle cannot be sure of that. However, this is the story:—A certain fairy—a bad, wicked one, I need not say—fell in love with a gentleman who had a wife; but unable to get hold of him otherwise, she lured him to that Roche aux Fées, which was her favourite haunt, and there she seduced him, and took him away, and he was never seen on earth again."

"Was he one of my ancestors?" demurely asked Adèle.

"Mademoiselle may laugh; it is a true story for all that; and his widow, thinking, poor thing, that he had fallen down into the torrent, and got drowned there, married a sire of Courcelles, from whom Mademoiselle is descended."

Adèle laughed gaily, and asked—

"And why should this prevent me from going to the Roche aux Fées with Monsieur Osborne?"

"Because the fairy was so well pleased with her success—bad, wicked thing—that she left a spell on the place for ever. Man and woman cannot enter it together without falling straight in love with each other. Age, ugliness, deformity, make no difference; love they must, and for ever. They may be married, they may be free; they can no more help loving, than they can help existing."

She spoke with much solemnity; but the blue eyes of Adèle sparkled with mischievous light.

"I know how to manage," she said, demurely; "I will make you and Monsieur Osborne go in together; so I shall be quite safe."

Jeannette looked very indignant.

"Mademoiselle is laughing at her old servant," she began, but a kiss interrupted her.

"Do not be angry, Jeannette," said Adèle, soothingly, "I do not believe in your story; but for all that, I promise you that I shall never go to the Roche aux Fées with Monsieur Osborne."

Jeannette had had her way so far, but her mind was not more at ease.

"It will not end well," she thought, as she sat with a basket on her knees at the bottom of Mr. Osborne's boat. Keenly she watched them both; Mr. Osborne was rowing the little skiff across the lake, but he was also looking at Adèle, perhaps because she sat opposite him, perhaps because he thought that she looked even more than usually pretty on that mellow autumn afternoon, and perhaps for both reasons. Adèle looked at him too, and very attentively, but in the still waters of the still lake, where she saw his face reflected. Jeannette saw both looks, and felt sorely disturbed. "If they are both fond of one another," she thought, "the harm is not so great; but if it is all of one side, and of the wrong side!"—A groan finished the thought.

"Why, Jeannette, what ails you?" asked Adèle, looking amazed.

Jeannette was spared the trouble of replying; they had crossed the breadth of the lake, and were entering a narrow creek, where Mr. Osborne moored his boat, at the foot of a chapel-crowned rock, along which a sweep of sunshine glided down, orange-red.

The same burning tint lit sky, blue mountain-top, branches of stately pine, slate roof, walls of crumbling

stone, and eternal rock. Where it passed, all was ardent and bright, and where it was not, prevailed a cold, dewy freshness and gloom. The antique chapel rose on its lone rock like an oratory built there for Hermit or Cenobite. A half-ruined building attached to it behind might, indeed, have been inhabited once on a time, but the whole had a look of solitude, and seemed consecrated to one thought and one home. From the rock trickled down a chill-looking spring, that chafed and murmured as it went along, passing through shade and through sunshine like an unquiet heart that knows not how to take the mingled woes and blessings of daily life.

With a few steps they reached the chapel-door—alas! it was broken, and for ever open to any who might choose to enter. Without, the cross still rose above the porch, but within, the altar was ruined and defaced; the light burned no more above the shrine; deserted was the sanctuary, and gone were the worshippers. “And is there, then, not a handful of the faithful left in the land to fill again this little house of God?” thought Mr. Osborne, with a sense of regret.

The gay, light laugh of Adèle roused him from these thoughts. Quick and impatient as ever, she had left his side to wander in the ruin; and he now heard her saying to Jeannette—

“I will, I will!” Then a sound of feet moving to dancing time followed. He gently pushed the door of what had once been the sacristy, and entering it, he caught sight, through another open door, of a room or hall lit by windows partly overgrown

with ivy, and with a large oaken table in the centre, that showed it to have been the refectory of the monks. But these details Mr. Osborne scarcely heeded.

On that table, where Prior, reverently bending, had once pronounced the pious Benedicite, and around which the austere monks had listened, with bent eyes and folded hands, to the blessing called down on their fare of herbs from the garden, and water from the spring, Adèle, with cheeks flushed, and dark hair unloosened by the motion of the dance, was now waltzing in circles so rapid, that Mr. Osborne, surprised at the novel sight, and dazzled by her swiftness, could scarcely follow the motion of her waving skirts and little flying feet on the table; for hardly had she reached the centre, when she was at the edge again, and seemed fairly over. In a moment, one step brought her back, but she only reached safety to seek new danger; and so she went on, evidently as much in her element as sylph in the air or salamander in the flame.

At length, wearied and breathless, she ceased. She glided down on the floor, and leaning against the edge of the table, she gathered up her fallen hair. As her hands parted it back from her face she saw Mr. Osborne, and no sooner did she see him than she flew like a bird through the ivied window nearest to her. He heard her lightly fall below, lightly run away, then all was still, save the rustling leaves of ivy. Mr. Osborne smiled, but Jeannette looked disconcerted.

“Monsieur must excuse her,” she said, depre-

catingly ; " but she is a wild little thing, and she was frightened."

" I was not at all frightened," said a saucy voice below the window, " and you are very rude to speak so of me behind my back."

" That child will drive me wild," exclaimed Jeannette, reddening.

" It is you who will drive me wild," pursued the voice of Adèle, without, " and when I die I shall haunt you."

Jeannette gave it up. With an indulgent smile Mr. Osborne left the chapel, and descending the rock, he found Adèle waiting for him below. -She did seem half wild with excitement and pleasure.

" I want my drawing," she despotically cried.

He had promised her a drawing of the chapel, and brought his sketch-book, and Adèle was not going to let him escape his promise. He asked if she would not wait.

" No—no. I want my drawing—the sun is setting."

He sat down by the margin of the chill spring ; above them rose the little ruin in its graceful solitude, with its background of sombre and yellow verdure and the blue clearness of the sky ; behind them rippled the calm lake, and around them breathed the divine charm of autumn and of noon. It stole with subtle power over the senses of Mr. Osborne. Oh ! this was not a day to draw, to sketch, to act or to live ; it was a day for torpid dreams on mossy banks, around which curled leaves sere and withering ; a day to remember past autumns and lost springs—

springs, alas! save on such days lost and forgot. But the springs of Adèle were before her yet. She was not tired; she was not dreamy. Autumn told her no tales, awoke no slumbering voices, plunged her in no delightful lethargy of sense and heart. Life was all alive within her, and all impatient, too.

"Why do you not draw?" she asked, assuming a frown.

But he only threw his sketch-book by, and said earnestly:

"Have you ever felt dull?"

"Perhaps I have," was her careless answer. "I am not sure—I do not remember."

"Happy doubt!" he thought, but aloud he merely said, still questioning: "Or sad?"

"Sad! Why should I be sad?" she asked, with a laugh of joyous surprise.

"Are you so very happy, then?"

"Perhaps I am—I do not know; I have never thought about it; but why should I be sad? I shall be seventeen in May. I have never had the tooth-ache nor any ache whatever. When I lay my head down at night my eyes shut at once and never open till the next morning, and scarcely are they open, when I feel something within me that seems to say: 'Sing and be glad.' I can run like a deer, I can climb like a kid, I can leap like a fish, too. Jeanette and Jean are fond of me, and no one dislikes me—and the world is pleasant, and God is good.—Why, then, should I be sad?"

Her azure eyes laughed down in his face, for he sat reclining on one elbow, and she stood by his

side ; her white teeth shone like pearls behind her parted lips ; his raised look beheld her in all the freshness and the bloom of youthful grace and beauty ; it rested on her with a strange and vague delight, which the smile of his handsome mouth betrayed, for was she not part of the beauty of that autumn : the very spirit of youth, the fairest promise of life, triumphing in the midst of Nature's sadness and decay ?

" Ah ! what a pity," he thought ; " what a mortal pity it would be to fall in love with that girl and marry her !"

" And so you will not draw ?" she said, in a tone of such regret, that at once he took up his sketch-book, and proceeded to gratify her.

With breathless interest she looked on — with enthusiastic admiration she admired when he had done. But the sun was setting, a bright glow stole over the mountains and set the dark surface of the lake on fire ; Mr. Osborne looked at his watch.

" Oh ! not yet—pray not yet," entreated Adèle ; " we will not go home till the moon is up and the stars are shining in the sky. I have stayed with you—you must stay with me."

" Where ?" he asked.

She did not reply, but darted up the rocky path. He followed her swiftly and entered with her the refectory of the ruined convent. A bright fire blazed on the broad stone hearth of the ancient chimney, and Jeannette was pouring oil in an ancient iron lamp.

" What does all this mean ?" asked Mr. Osborne, turning to Adèle. She laughed and clapped her

hands with delight, and threw a heap of dry sticks on the fire ; they burned with a crackling noise.

"It is cold here in the evening," she said gaily, "cold and damp."

"And what is Jeannette doing there?" he asked.

"Putting chesnuts to roast in the fire," was the triumphant reply.

"And what is she pouring into that tin casserole?"

"Wine, old wine, into which Jeannette will put nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon, and every sweet spice. Oh ! it is so good with the chestnuts—you will see. Jeannette, Jeannette, go for more wood. There is plenty outside."

The old woman left the room and did not return at once. The darkness of the evening had set in, and through the ivied window the early stars shone with tremulous light ; again the fire flame had joyously sprung up in the old chimney, lighting up all its quaint sculptures : below demons grinned and mouthed, and above them angel faces looked pure and mild. The dancing light fell in full glow on the little figure of Adèle. She sat on a log of wood with her arms clasped around her knees, and her look dreamily fastened on the fire. Opposite her, leaning with folded arms against the sculptured stone, stood Mr. Osborne. Suddenly she looked up in his face.

"I am Cinderella," she said, "Cinderella sitting in the ashes, and you are——"

"The Prince," he suggested, a little perfidiously. Adèle impatiently shook her head.

"The Prince, no ! the good fairy Godmother. Oh !

how I like that story. It is beautiful! Poor Cinderella sitting in the ashes."

"Did she dance on the dinner-table?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Why not?" promptly replied Adèle; "why should not Cinderella dance on the tables—on such tables as this, too? I have a great mind to dance on it now," she added, starting to her feet.

He laughed, and said she dared not.

"Dare not! dare not!" she cried; "do you defy me?"

He did.

Light as a bird she perched upon the table, and shaking back her curls, she looked at him triumphantly; slowly she began to move to the sound of her own voice, then either, changing her mind or remembering her chesnuts in peril, or perhaps both, she suddenly lighted down, and kneeling on the hearth, she began with dainty and agile fingers to rake them out. He wanted to assist her, but she would not allow it.

"I am mistress here," she said; "my business is to burn my fingers, and yours is to eat and drink. There, the wine is hot now."

She took a glass and a plate from Jeannette's basket. The glass she filled with the hot wine, that exhaled a spicy odour; she handed him the plate on which the chesnuts looked warm and brown, and she gazed up at him with the cordial look of a little hostess to a welcome guest. Jeannette, who had come in, threw more wood on the fire, she poured more oil into the iron lamp, and the sense of a wild,

rugged comfort, mingling with the rushing of the autumn wind without, came pleasantly to Mr. Osborne, as he slowly drank the hot wine, and abstractedly looked at little Adèle.

He had forgotten all about going away; but of her own accord she gave the signal of departure.

"What a pity to go," she said, with a sigh; "but we must; light the lantern, Jeannette."

"It has been lit this half-hour, Mademoiselle."

"Has it? then give it to me; I shall know the way better than either of you."

She seized the lantern from Jeannette's hand, and darting out, scarcely gave the two time to follow. Jack-of-the-lantern was a better guide any night than Adèle proved down the rocky path. Sharp was the remonstrance of Jeannette as she at length reached the boat, and even Mr. Osborne found something to say.

"I once saw a play acted," he said, "in which a certain sprite played a great many tricks on certain unlucky individuals, but the rocks among which he led them were painted pasteboard, and these are sharp realities."

"A play!" exclaimed Adèle, eagerly; "oh, do tell me what a play is like."

Mr. Osborne was rowing his little boat across the lake, the light of the rising moon shone on his calm face, and showed Adèle that he smiled.

"Is there but one play?" he asked.

"Ah, there must be a great many, I know; but still, what is one like? Tell me, is it true that the floor opens, and that tables come up covered with

dishes, and that people drop down from the ceiling?"

"Oh, there are things more extraordinary still," he answered, gravely; "for people die singing, like so many swans, which is little short of a miracle, you know."

"Oh, that I could but see a play!" cried Adèle.

Mr. Osborne was surprised; had she really never been to a play?

"Never: do you not remember that I told you so the other day?"

But Mr. Osborne's memory was at fault.

"We were in the maze," she persisted; but this circumstantial evidence did not help him to remember. "How odd," said Adèle.

"And what a pity; I actually had orders for the play this morning. There is a company now acting at Nantua, and if I only had those orders, they were for a front box, too, I could have rowed you and Jeannette over in five minutes."

"Oh, what a pity! what a pity!" she cried; "what did you do with them?"

Mr. Osborne was not sure whether he had lit a cigar or wiped a pen, but he rather thought it must be the cigar that had consumed them.

"Ah! what a pity! But are you sure? Perhaps you did not burn them, after all."

He granted the possibility of the fact.

"Who knows but they are in your pocket still?" eagerly said Adèle.

"There can be at least no harm in trying," he good-humouredly replied; and looking in his pocket,

he found, to his great surprise, that the orders were there.

"Oh, you are my good angel!" cried Adèle, enthusiastically.

"Scarcely orthodox, Mademoiselle Adèle; your good angel would never be expected to take you to a play; and yet you may be sure that your good angel himself would not find a word to say against anything you shall hear or see to-night."

But Jeannette was not going to submit to this; and she was opening her lips to inform Mr. Osborne that he might throw her into the lake at once, or turn her out of his house the next morning—she kindly left him his choice—but that to the play with her little mistress he should not go whilst Jeannette had the breath of life, when Mr. Osborne forestalled the objection.

"The orders are for two," he said; "and as I have business in Nantua, I cannot share with you the pleasure of the evening, but I shall, of course, escort you home, and you will tell me all about it to-morrow."

Sincerely Adèle sympathized with his disappointment, and zealously did she promise to tell him every word of every play she was to see. Jeannette was silent—she could not well object; the escort of a faithful female servant is held sufficient for decorum, even in the proud but homely old French nobility; and the protection of her presence was more than sufficient for poor little Adèle; but for all that it could not end well—oh, no, it could not.

But they did not dream of evil, no presentiment

warned them of coming sorrow. The evening was clear and still ; a pale sky was reflected in pale waters. Between both, with steep summits cut out in uneven outlines, rose the dark mountains, darker shadows lurking at their feet. The little boat glided on softly, and Mr. Osborne looking around him, enjoyed the calm serenity of the hour. The light ripple of the water, a far star shining in the far sky, the passing of the wind through the pines of the mountains, were more to him than all Adèle could hope to see. Not so with the young girl. She saw nothing, save floating images, none of which she could grasp, but all lovely and splendid.

At length, the lake was crossed. They landed in the poor little town that faced Courcelles ; they entered a dirty and narrow street, passed a white church, with white stone steps, that shone in the moonlight, and stopped before a small square building like a Doric temple, the theatre of the place. With a beating heart Adèle read the bill, "Marry for Love," a vaudeville ; and "Alcestis," a tragedy. The mere names sent her into a dream, from which she did not waken until she found herself sitting in a narrow box, facing a lit and murmuring house, and a stage with a brightly-painted curtain. It represented palace stairs and noble gardens, with sea and the outline of azure hills on the distant sky.

"Is that the play?" eagerly asked Adèle, turning round, but she looked in vain for Mr. Osborne. He was gone, Jeannette said. She had not time to say more. The fiddle in the orchestra struck up with a squeak, the curtain rose, and revealed a gorgeous

ball-room, filled with such lovely ladies and such gallant gentlemen, that Adèle leaned back breathless with astonishment and delight. "There never was anything like it," she whispered to Jeannette. Never, indeed, save at sixteen, on the night of a first play. She saw not the painted boards, the tinsel draperies, the shabby dresses. Youth, the marvellous enchanter, waved his wand; the boards were shining marble floors; the miserable gauze skirt was rarest lace; the threadbare velvet cloak was genoa, double piled; the diamonds were from the mines of Golconda. And oh! more wonderful still, the quaint, wearied men were cavaliers in all the bloom and ardour of manly beauty, even as the poor, faded girls, whom they courted, were coy amongst maidens and fair amongst women. The vaudeville had many a burlesque incident, with its slight thread of romance; Adèle laughed till the tears ran down her cheek, for her sense of the ludicrous was keen; it had many a little pathetic touch, and Adèle leaned her cheek on her hand and wept slowly. It closed with three marriages—all for love—and a tableau, and Adèle had never seen anything like it, but Jeannette had.

"My young master," she said, "once took a fancy to act a play. Ah, how handsome he looked in his white satin coat, and with what an air he offered a nosegay of roses to his wife, who acted the shepherdess. But his cousin, the Marquis, kissed her hand; and it seems *that* was not in the play, and so Monsieur would have no more acting; and I believe, too, it was the cause of his first quarrel with

Madame, but it did not last. I entered Madame's boudoir unawares, and I found him on his knees before her ; for a gentleman then was not ashamed of kneeling to a lady, and a husband of being fond of his wife. And now people marry for love—in plays, and the girl who has no dot may dress Saint Catherine's hair."

To dress Saint Catherine's hair means in French to be an old maid ; twenty-five is the age fixed for that rubicon of a woman's life. Adèle heard, but did not heed her. Once more the curtain had risen—the tragedy had begun. Alcestis had offered herself for her husband ; her sacrifice had been accepted ; and in dirge-like accents she bade life and love farewell. Adèle did not weep—she could not, but she was thrilled through the very heart ; the blood forsook her cheek ; her pale lips quivered ; woe, deep woe, filled her being. It was over ; Alcestis was won back from the grave ; once more she blest and was blest ; doubly happy, for she had died, and she could live for him whom she loved.

The curtain had fallen ; the stage was dark ; the house was emptying ; but twice Adèle had to be addressed by Jeannette before she moved. She started up like one wakening from a dream, and went down stairs without a word. Mr. Osborne was waiting below. He looked at her from head to foot.—Where was her cloak ? Jeannette uttered a cry of alarm. Mademoiselle's head had been turned by the play : she had left her cloak above, and never should she see it again. At once Mr. Osborne ran up for it.

"Oh, but how can he know the right box?"—
(cloak-room there was none in the theatre of Nantua)
—exclaimed Adèle.

Jeannette grumbled that he would know it sure enough, but was pacified by seeing him appear with the cloak on his arm. With a smile he put it around Adèle; and as they went down to the boat, he asked how she had been entertained?

"I do not think I have been so happy before," she said, and she seemed unable to say more. She sat in the boat with her head on her knees, and only addressed Mr. Osborne once more; to bid him good night! as they parted in the garden, and to say—

"Oh, I have been so happy to-night! Oh, what a day it has been!"

He smiled kindly, pleased with her pleasure, and he entered his study; what he found there, we may know later. The whole of that long night his lamp burned unextinguished. Alas! the dark days lulled awhile, had returned, and doubt and care shared that vigil with him.

And Adèle, too, watched; for after so much pleasure, how could she sleep? Jeannette, indeed, had succeeded in persuading her to go to bed, but she could not make her bright eyes close—she could not make her quick and lively tongue be silent.

"Jeannette, did you ever see such a beautiful creature as that Alcestis?"

"Beautiful! she was not beautiful, Mademoiselle; and at all events, you are a great deal prettier."

"Oh, Jeannette, you are dreaming!" cried Adèle, leaning upon one elbow; "she was beautiful—beautiful! and then, do you not see how she died for her husband?"

"Mademoiselle does not suppose I believe that."

"Why not?"

Jeannette answered that it was not the way of the world now-a-days for ladies to wear white dresses and no sleeves, and to die for their husbands.

Adèle sank back, and looked thoughtful.

"Jeannette," she said, after a tolerably long pause, "do you think there really are women who do not like their husbands?"

"Plenty, Mademoiselle! plenty!"

"Who would not die for them, I mean!"

"Die for them—not they!"

Adèle sighed, and thought the world must be in a sad state. Jeannette rather shortly asked why the wives were all to die for their husbands, and not the husbands for their wives? But Adèle, without answering this plain logical question, exclaimed, with some ardour—

"Jeannette, I do not think I shall ever have a husband, but if I have, oh! Jeannette, how I will love him! how I shall be ready—willing—glad to die for him any day like Alcestis—beautiful Alcestis! But what a pity," she added, changing her tone, "that her husband was not more like her! Do you know I thought he looked fat in his tunic. Now what business had he to be fat, recovering from a severe illness, and losing a good and lovely wife? I could not help thinking when I looked at him—

what a pity Alcestis is not married to Monsieur Osborne."

But Jeannette, alarmed at this remark, and at the conjugal turn which the thoughts of her young mistress were taking, promptly put in—

"And why should not the husband of Madame Alcestis look fat? I dare say the poor gentleman had had the dropsy, and if Monsieur Osborne had had it too—"

"You are very tiresome, Jeannette," cried Adèle, turning her flushed face towards the wall; "what put it into your head that Monsieur Osborne was to have the dropsy? it is quite ridiculous to say so."

"I hope he may never have it, for it would certainly spoil his good looks!" persisted the perverse old woman; "but Mademoiselle is sleepy, and I am tired; and I have the honour to bid Mademoiselle a very good night!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BROTHERHOOD.

MR. OSBORNE had found Robert Osborne drinking in his study. With severe aspect he greeted his younger brother. But Robert had a cool impudence which nothing could move or disconcert. With a self-possession which a diplomatist might have envied, he said, from his chair, as the pale face of Mr. Osborne, who had entered by the garden, appeared from behind the glass door, "Why, William, where have you been all this time?"

In vain Mr. Osborne looked at him with a darkening face; in vain, good man as Adèle thought him—we need not say, once for all, that she exaggerated his virtues as well as his perfections—his lips quivered, and grew white with anger. Robert's nature was thick and impervious. The sternness of his late father, who hated him; the flattery of his mother, who feared him; the sharpness of his sisters, who laughed at him; and the severity of his brother William, who despised and disliked him

as a man without intellect or honour, found Robert equally cool and insensible. Robert loved himself too tenderly and too fondly, though without romance, to care a farthing about any one. Mr. Osborne sat down, looked at his younger brother, and gravely said—

“What brought you here, Robert?”

Robert stared.

“Did you not send for me?”

“I did not.”

“Ma wrote that you did, or that you wanted me here.”

“Had I wanted you, I was equal to the task of writing to you. Mrs. Osborne may have advised you to come; she can scarcely have written that I required your presence.”

“Capital wine!” said Robert, pouring himself out a glass.

Mr. Osborne was leaning back in his chair;—gravely and sternly he looked at Robert.

“You have not answered me. What brought you here? I suppose you did not come without some dim intentions of some kind or other.”

But Robert was thick-skinned. Such frail shafts pierced him not. He poured himself out another glass of wine—he had poured himself out a good many in his solitude—tossed it off, and setting down the empty tumbler, he stared at his elder brother; and instead of the humble confession which Mrs. Osborne had advised—instead of lamenting or excusing the shameless breach of trust of which he had been guilty, he coolly said—

"Intentions! yes, I have intentions!—I'll be a partner."

Mr. Osborne laughed disdainfully.

"I tell you I will!" shouted Robert; "reject me if you dare!"

"Dare is an awkward word, even between brothers," coolly observed Mr. Osborne, not in the least angry.

"That for the brotherhood!" cried Robert, dashing on the floor the contents of his glass, which he had filled again.

Mr. Osborne had a horror of coarseness and brutality; his brother Robert was, in every respect, antipathetic to him; but he controlled himself, and merely observed—

"You are losing your temper, Robert."

But Robert's bullying nature was quite up now.

"I tell you you dare not," he said, more aggressively than before, "reject me as a partner, and I'll compete in England. I know more of the business than you do."

"More of the money, certainly," said Mr. Osborne.

"And I'll cut the ground under your feet," pursued Robert, triumphantly. He struck the table until decanter and glasses rang again.

The clashing sound jarred on Mr. Osborne's sensitive nerves. He started up from his reclining position, and even in that moment, he could not help observing, with ill-repressed impatience:

"For Heaven's sake, Robert, leave the table alone; hit your chair if you must hit something."

"I tell you I'll cut the ground under your feet," screamed Robert, at the height of passion; "I'll not be trampled upon by you."

Indignation, pity, and scorn, passed across Mr. Osborne's pale and expressive face: pity for so much folly, for so low a nature, prevailed.

"Cut away my poor boy," he said; "you are very welcome."

The sad significance of his tone startled even the dulness of Robert; but he said nothing; Mr. Osborne resumed.

"To make your task the easier, I shall withdraw and leave you sole master of the field. What you have made of the English business; what confidence you will inspire all with; what trust will be reposed in your sagacity and your honour, after the manner in which you have repaid the trust of your elder brother—I need not tell you."

He spoke with undisguised irony. Robert heard him aghast; his sallow face turned pure yellow and lengthened visibly.

"You are jesting," he said at length, giving him a doubtful glance; "matters cannot be so bad as all that."

"I am in earnest," replied Mr. Osborne, once more raising himself up from his reclining attitude, and speaking with marked sternness; "I tell you that you have all but ruined me, and that you shall not ruin me outright."

"Withdraw!" surlily said Robert; "much you know of business. What if you cannot?"

Mr. Osborne turned very pale; his white lips

quivered ; for a picture of dishonour and ruin flashed before him. Had Robert been more guilty than he had thought.

“What do you mean?” he asked, at length.

The subtle arts of a deceiver were not Robert’s forte : his nature was gross and blunt ; the truth rose to his lips, but Mr. Osborne’s white face and angry eyes startled and alarmed him. He thrust his hands in his pockets, and whistled carelessly.

“Ah ! bah !” he said ; “stay or withdraw—what is it to me.”

“Robert, are those bonds safe?” asked Mr. Osborne.

“Oh ! ay, safe enough.”

Asseverations would not have deceived him ; this careless tone could not remove his lurking suspicion.

“Robert—Robert,” he said, raising his hand with some menace. “The rest is nothing—*that*—no, that I could not forgive.”

“Why, what would it be to you?” asked Robert, with a sneer.

“Say, rather what would it be to you!” replied his brother : “a journey to the colonies.”

“Why, who could prove it?”

“I could,” said Mr. Osborne. Inexorable looked his clear cut face.

Robert stared, then burst out into a loud laugh, took another glass of wine, and finally saying he was tired, he rose and withdrew.

“Ah ! what an inheritance !” groaned Mr. Osborne, as the door closed upon his younger brother. He felt sick and weary of his hard task. Disgust and

contempt had prevented him from reproaching Robert with a treason which he had partly accomplished ; the details were not yet known to Mr. Osborne, of the object he could have no doubt. Robert had framed a grossly conceived plot to supplant his brother ; a plot which Monsieur Morel had, though with great caution, abetted. He probably thought that the dull and gross Robert would be a more easily managed master than the proud and keen Mr. Osborne.

But treason is rarely successful. A fatality, a retributive justice, attend it. The temptation of drawing too freely had proved too strong for Robert, and had at once betrayed him ; not, indeed, before much mischief was done, but in time to defeat his intended coup d'état. Derisively Mr. Osborne perceived his aim, and promptly, and with the aid of Adèle, he defeated it for ever. The business in England had been declining under Robert's rule ; he resolved to let it fall.

His measures were all taken, when Robert made his appearance in Courcelles, and Robert's threats were therefore mere matter of scorn and laughter to his elder brother, but of a scorn with which weariness blended.

"Ah ! what an inheritance," he thought again, leaning his brow on his hand, and remembering with a sigh his days of careless and wandering liberty. Vain regret ! His duties had but begun ; the thorny path was yet but half cleared : leaving to the Future to reveal the mischances which he felt brooding, Mr. Osborne turned his thoughts to the Present.

For Robert had consented to bring a sort of statement of his misdeeds, which Mr. Osborne found on his table. That it was garbled and insincere, he could not doubt; yet, such as it was, how much it revealed! He could not sleep. He sat up all night, restless and anxious; he sat up until the next morning found him the same prey to tormenting suspense. "He dared not have done it," he thought; "he dare not."

Mr. Osborne was pacing his study up and down; his brow was knit and overcast, his look was weary and sad, when Adèle burst in upon him bright and joyous.

"I know all about them,—I can tell you every word," she cried; but she paused, silenced by his pale, worn face; her tongue was mute, and her wistful look that sought his, plainly said, "My friend, what ails you?"

"I have had unpleasant news," he said. Adèle drew nearer to him. She was sorry,—very sorry. He smiled sadly. "I am used to it," he replied; "life is made up of toil and cares, of trusts betrayed, and ill-placed confidence; and habit," he added, pausing, "reconciles us to it all."

"Does it?" she asked, looking up in his face.

He gently laid his hand on her head.

"May it never reconcile you," he said.

Adèle saw that he looked tired; she saw his

table covered with papers, and she guessed the truth.

"You sat up all night!" she exclaimed, "and I—oh, I slept so soundly."

He said he was glad of it; but Adèle seemed disturbed and sorry. Could she really do nothing for him?—Write no letters, make up no accounts?—He did not know how faithful and how secretive she could be.

"But I can imagine it," he said, smiling.

"Well, then, give me something to do," she asked, ardently.

"But there is nothing to do. I have done it all last night," he gently answered.

"How tiresome! you do everything for me; and I—I can do nothing for you."

"Well, perhaps I may find something for you to do now, for here is Jean coming with more letters, I suppose."

Adèle looked over her shoulder, and saw Jean standing at the head of the little balcony that led to the garden. He gave her a wistful look—why was she there?—But he brought no letters for his master.

"Mademoiselle Osborne and her maid are come," he said, in a submissive voice.

"Ah, how tiresome!" thought Adèle, with a sigh; but Mr. Osborne's clouded brow cleared; he smiled, and looked pleased.

"Bring them round this way," he said; "what, will you not stay and see my little girl?" he added, as he saw Adèle following Jean out of the room.

At once she turned back with joyous surprise.

"Your little girl!" she cried; "it is your little girl!"

"Of course it is; she has lost the aunt with whom I had left her, so I have sent for her."

Adèle clapped her hands, and looked delighted.

"I am so glad!" she cried, "I am so glad! I did so wish for your little girl to come. I am so glad."

She had not time to dwell on this joyous theme: steps were heard on the gravelled garden paths, a childish voice asked in broken French, questions to which mature Parisian tones gave replies. In a few moments more a brown middle-aged woman in white cap, and a serious little girl in deep mourning, appeared on the balcony. A natural instinct of delicacy made Adèle retire to the background of the room; Mr. Osborne advanced; he took up his child in his arms; he attempted to kiss her, and was received with a kick and a scream.

"The man shall not kiss me!" cried Miss Osborne, desperately; "he shall not!"

Adèle looked bewildered and alarmed; but Mr. Osborne only laughed. The French *bonne* argued—it was not a man, it was *Mademoiselle's* papa; and at length Lilian held up her cheek, and sulkily submitted to the paternal caress. Mr. Osborne untied her bonnet-strings, placed her in his chair, and smoothing the hair from her brow, he looked at her attentively. He had not seen her for three years, and he found her altered and improved. She was a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, strikingly like her father, and though a little pale, remarkably beauti-

ful. As Mr. Osborne looked at this living image of himself, cast in the frail and tender mould of childhood, his eye softened. He sat down, and taking his little girl on his knee, he caressed her tenderly. The seriousness of Lilian's face partly relaxed, and she condescended to smile, and even to speak.

"Who is that little girl?" she asked, looking over at Adèle, whom her father had forgotten.

"Mademoiselle de Courcelles is not a little girl," he said, smiling, "she is a young lady. How do you like her?"

He spoke in French. Lilian gave Adèle a solemn, attentive look that made her heart beat. What if Monsieur Osborne's child should take a dislike to her?

"She is very pretty," at length said Miss Osborne, who thereby showed, that like her papa, she had a decided liking for a pretty face.

Adèle was advancing; she reddened, and half drew back. Mr. Osborne smiled, and persisted—

"Do you like her?"

"Oh, yes," was the cool reply, uttered without enthusiasm; for Miss Osborne was like her papa in that too. She had few strong partialities. Mr. Osborne, nevertheless, asked if she would not give the lady her hand? and Lilian, attracted perhaps by the fair young face of Adèle, did not merely give her her hand, but held up her cheek to be kissed.

"Where are your toys?" she asked.

"I have no toys. I am not a little girl!" rather indignantly replied Adèle; "I am old, quite old."

But Lilian did not mind her.

"Oh, how pretty!" she cried, touching with her childish finger a little gold brooch which Adèle wore in her collar, and which Lilian's feminine eyes had at once spied out. It was very small and very light; it was also the only ornament of any kind which Adèle possessed: but at once she unfastened it, and pinning it in Lilian's dress, she said, with joyous readiness—

"Take it; it is yours."

Lilian had been spoiled, and she accepted the gift very coolly. She was pleased, and she said, "Thank you!" but to be presented with what she admired was a matter of course. Lilian's father, however, looked up at the donor, and smiled so kindly, that Lilian's *bonne* at once concluded Lilian was going to have a new mamma, and though Adèle had no such thought, she reddened, half ashamed at a look so friendly.

"*Bon sang ne peut mentir*," said Mr. Osborne; "you are of a generous race, Mademoiselle Adèle, and give you must."

"I am hungry," said Lilian, jumping down from his knee; and, taking the hand of Adèle, she evidently expected to be led away to where she could find something to eat.

Mr. Osborne had probably had enough of the paternal, or he had, perhaps, other cares on his mind for he let Lilian go.

"Are you his little girl?" asked Lilian, as she descended the steps with Adèle.

"But I am not a little girl," replied Adèle, rather vexed.

"Mademoiselle is a young lady," began the bonne, but Lilian interrupted her.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Adèle de Courcelles."

"And what are you?" continued Lilian.

They were crossing the garden to re-enter the house. Adèle looked around her, and smiled wistfully. What was she in the home her ancestors had reared?—where her grandsires and her grandames had flourished? She stooped over the little stranger, and she softly kissed the future mistress of Courcelles.

"I hope you will be very happy here," she said.

But a pettish wish that she had something to eat, was Lilian's only reply.

"Poor little thing, she is hungry!" said Adèle.

At once she led her into the house, and with the same zeal, though without the same necessity which she had showed on the evening of Mr. Osborne's arrival, she superintended the first meal which Lilian took in her father's dwelling. Mr. Osborne looked in whilst Lilian was eating in the Hall, smiled abstractedly at the hospitable anxiety Adèle showed in heaping the child's plate, and after lingering a few moments, and saying a few kind words, he left them. Adèle felt disappointed. Monsieur Osborne did not seem to her to be sufficiently fond of his little girl. She did not think so, when, without seeking it, she suddenly came upon them that afternoon in the garden. Lilian had of her own accord gone to seek her

papa ; and Adèle thought them both in his study, when she caught sight of them in one of the many arbours of the garden. Mr. Osborne was sitting on a bench, and Lilian sat on his knee ; her shyness and his coldness were all gone. Her arms were clasped around his neck—their two faces were meeting in a fond embrace. He was covering her cheek and her brow with kisses, which Lilian received with childish screams, half of pleasure, half of mimic anger. She said he should not, and he said he would. She slapped him ruthlessly, and he only laughed at her wrath. At length, a treaty of peace was concluded ; he promised to be quiet ; she promised to behave herself. A calm kiss sealed their reconciliation ; gently his lips sank on her cheek ; softly her childish hand stroked and patted his. The heart of Adèle swelled and rose ; tears started to her eyes. They had not seen her ; she turned into an alley, and sitting down on a bench, she felt very solitary.

Why was she not loved ? why did no one caress her ? “ Happy little girl ! ” she thought, “ happy little girl ! ” She was not jealous ; Mr. Osborne had been very kind, but nothing in his kindness could have authorised the feeling. She was only a stranger, and his little girl was his flesh and blood. No, she was not jealous ; she was not envious, either. She would not have robbed Lilian of anything Lilian had, not for the world ; but she felt very solitary ; she felt that it would have been very delightful to have been thus loved ; very pleasant to receive a fondness so endearing. “ Happy little girl ! ” she thought again, “ oh, yes, very happy.” But can sadness

linger long with youth? The song of a bird perched on a neighbouring tree first drew, then diverted, her attention. The day sparkled with mingled dew and sunshine; the mountains rose clear in the keen blue sky; below, the lake lay calm and still, scarcely rippled by the pure fresh breeze. The very quickness of the air gave every object a life more distinct. The old moss-grown statues around her seemed to feel, like her, the genial warmth of the sun; everywhere life prevailed joyous and triumphant. Adèle shook her tears away. "The very bird sings and rejoices," she thought, and she broke forth into a joyous carol, which the appearance of Mr. Osborne coming towards her quickly interrupted. He was alone; yet with the familiarity of a friend he sat down on the bench by her.

"Always merry!" he said, smiling.

"Not always," replied Adèle.

"But never sad," he pursued, "at least, so you said yesterday, did you not?"

"Yes, but I feel lonely sometimes, not often, but sometimes. I am glad your little girl is come to Courcelles, for now I know that you will really stay here."

"For some time, at least."

"For ever," she said, "not for some time."

He smiled, and did not think it likely. The shadow of a cloud passed over the sunny face of Adèle, but impatiently shaking her head, she said—

"Well, well, you are not gone yet."

"I may go any day," said Mr. Osborne, very gravely, "and never return."

Adèle looked disconcerted, then smiled incredulously.

"You are jesting!" she said, quickly, "but I wish you would not—I wish you would not."

Mr. Osborne looked firmly in her face.

"On my word I am not jesting," he said; "I am in sober earnest."

She looked at him mute and stricken. Mr. Osborne seemed very much troubled.

"Child," he said, "why are you disturbed? Life is made up of sorrows and separations, and both have to be borne."

Adèle looked humble and ashamed, and tears trembled on her dark eyelashes; her downcast eyes were laden with grief.

"Do not be angry with me," she said.

"Angry!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, reddening a little; "did I speak with anger?"

"I cannot help it," she pursued, "you have been so very kind; and then what shall I do when you are gone? with whom shall I read, talk, and walk then?"

"How did you do before I came?" he asked, smiling.

"Ah, I had never had a friend then; I was like Adam in Paradise—I did not know Eve—I did not care about her."

"The comparison would be prettier reversed," said Mr. Osborne, unable to repress a little sarcasm.

"Let us reverse it, then," replied Adele, not a whit discomposed; "it always comes to the same thing, for you know what I mean."

This was true enough ; and without pursuing the subject, Mr. Osborne merely said, in his habitually kind tone,—

“ Providence will send you another friend ; you are too good and too pretty not to marry some day.”

“ Marry without money !” interrupted Adèle, amazed at the idea, and laughing gaily, too ; “ oh, no ! no one marries without money ; and I have nothing—not a sou,” she added, with a sort of triumph in her poverty.

“ And do you really mean to say,” observed Mr. Osborne, slightly surprised, “ that you do not think ever to marry, because you have no money ?”

“ I am sure of it,” she confidently replied ; “ Jeanette and Cousine both say so, and they ought to know.”

“ Would you wish to marry ?” he pursued, rather earnestly.

“ But since it is no use wishing,” she said, impatiently.

“ But if it were ?” he insisted.

“ Ah, bah !” said Adèle, throwing her hand behind her shoulder with careless grace, “ I shall be seventeen in May ; what need I think about all that ?”

He smiled and his brow cleared. “ She is but a child,” he thought.

“ But I wish you would not go,” she said, with a chagrined look ; “ I wish you would not.”

“ Well, and perhaps I shall not,” he replied ; “ it may be the will of Providence that I should stay here, and in that case I should wish——”

What Mr. Osborne wished Adèle never knew; for Jean interrupted the discourse by bringing his master a packet of letters.

"Perhaps he will want me," thought Adèle, remembering his words that morning and though she rose from the bench, she did not leave the alley.

The mere look of the letters had brought a cloud to Mr. Osborne's brow; he had that morning received a partial account of Robert's misdeeds, and he now expected a fuller and more severe narrative. He looked at the directions and at the seals of the three epistles, and could not make up his mind to open them. With the horror, with the loathing and disgust, with which meanness, treachery, and cupidity ever inspired him, he at length compelled himself to break the seals, and read the full history.

"How long he is reading those letters!" thought Adèle.

She looked round; he was not reading, but he held a letter in his hand, and he was pale as death. Adèle looked without knowing whether to advance or retire: the friendly instinct prevailed. She went up to him, he took her hand within his, and he gave her a look so sad, so dreary, that her heart sank within her. Trembling, she sat down by him, and asked what had happened. Still he kept her hand within his, still looked at her, and spoke not.

"You frighten me!" she cried; "what is it?" He did not answer. "Is it a death?" she added. He shook his head. "Have you lost all your money?"

"No, child, I have not."

"Then what can it be?"

"Never trust a friend," he replied; "never trust a friend, my little Adèle."

"Never trust a friend!" she repeated after him; "and why so?"

"Never trust a friend," he said again, "or the best will deceive and betray you to sorrow."

"I have no friends to trust," said Adèle, shaking her head with a sad sagacity; "but you had, and they have deceived you, I see. God forgive them! the bad, the wicked people."

She spoke with such earnestness, that tears filled her eyes.

"Never love a friend, never serve a friend," he said; "he will turn against you in the end. He will be saved, and you will be the victim."

"But how bad those bad people must have been," cried Adèle, indignantly; "how bad to make you say such cruel things."

He dropped her hand, and folded his arms a little gloomily.

"Pray do not look so unhappy," said Adèle, drawing nearer to him; "and pray believe I never could betray you."

He had not heard her; he rose, and saying coldly, "Pray excuse me, I must go and speak to my brother Robert," he left her.

"Ah! his brother is here!" thought Adèle, beginning to understand what ailed him.

Mr. Osborne went straight to his study, Robert was there drinking as on the preceding evening.

Mr. Osborne removed the bottle with a severe hand, and faced his brother, stern and pitiless as Rhadamanthus.

“I know all,” he said.

A sullen meaning came over Robert's sensual, bloated face. He was not without a sort of dull conscience; it had been pricking him, and he had been endeavouring to drown its murmurs in wine.

“Transport me if you like,” he said, doggedly.

Mr. Osborne bowed his head, folded his arms, and communed with God in strange anguish of spirit and of heart: “Help me—guide me,” he prayed. “I confess myself a sinner every day before Thee. My wisdom is nought, or I had not fallen into this pit and become the prey of what I despised.” He was more calm when he looked up. He went to his cash-box; he took out a bundle of notes, and placed them in his brother's hand, without a word. But Robert understood him. It was condemnation, reproof, dismissal, forgiveness, all in one. He rose and silently turned away.

“Good-bye,” said Mr. Osborne; and he held out his hand.

“Good-bye,” said Robert, grasping it half in shame, half in cordiality, “I am sorry about these bonds—I see it cuts you—on my word; I am.”

Mr. Osborne did not answer one word. He knew that over the nature of Robert his nature never could exercise a lasting or beneficial influence; that his silence was more impressive than would have been the keenest reproof, the mildest preaching.

"You'll think better of me yet," said Robert, as he turned away.

Thus the two brothers parted. The offender slightly affected, yet in reality not much moved; the offended one silent and cold, though hurt to the very heart.

Mr. Osborne sank down in his chair. Ruin, disgrace, dishonour were before him.

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "had I but been spared that; had ruin taken any other form it seems as if I could have borne it patiently; but that——Oh! that!"

He leaned his head on his hand. He looked at the past, at the future. "Oh! ties of blood!" he thought, "are you not as often a curse as a blessing?" And raising his eyes, he saw Adèle standing on the threshold of his room, gazing at him thence with a wistful look, and holding Lilian by the hand.

CHAPTER XX.

ABSENCE.

WITH a smile he beckoned them both in. Adèle advanced hesitatingly.

"I have brought you your little girl," she said.

"To comfort me," he replied ; " why the sight of your face would do that."

He took Lilian on his knee ; he placed Adèle in a chair by his side, and he looked at her with a gaze that had in it something more than fixed attention. If Adèle had thought of love, she might have fancied that this was a lover's look ; and if she had known anything about love, she would have been very sure that it was not. But she thought nothing.

"I think you like me," he said, at length.

"Ah ! you know I do," she cried, warmly.

"Good, sincère little creature ! Yes, I do really believe that you are fond of me."

Was he speaking to her or to his own thoughts ? He took her hand in his.

"Would you like to live here with me, and with my little girl ?" he asked ; "I mean for ever ?"

"Will you stay here—will you really stay?" she asked, with sparkling eyes.

"I will, but will you?"

"Why not?" she asked, openly meeting his keen and penetrating look.

His next remark was not much to the purpose.

"When truth leaves her well," he said, "she will borrow Mademoiselle Adèle de Courcelles' brown frock. Lilian," he added, turning to his little girl, "I am going away; be good, and let that young lady give me a good account of you when I return."

"Is she good?" asked Lilian.

"As good as she is pretty," he said, rising and looking at his watch.

But Adèle only heard that he was to leave.

"You are going?" she cried, chagrined. "Oh! when will you come back?"

"As soon as I can."

"Ah! poor Monsieur Osborne," thought Adèle, taking Lilian's hand and leading her away, "they will not let him be quiet."

She went down with the child to the garden, and stayed there until she heard Jean leading out Joli, Mr. Osborne's bay horse; she then went with the child to the gate to bid Mr. Osborne adieu. He was not there yet, but Joli saw her and neighed, for they were old friends and true.

"Poor Joli," said Adèle, patting him fondly; "I have no sugar in my pocket to-day, Jeannette has locked the cupboard. But I will save some for when you come back. Bear your master faithfully, Joli, and bring him back soon, very soon."

"What are you saying to Joli?" asked Mr. Osborne's voice.

She turned round; he stood on the threshold of the Manor; he saw tears on her face; they sparkled on her rosy cheeks like dew on a flower.

"You soft-hearted little thing," he said, wiping those tears away with a gentle hand.

"Do not ride Joli too hard," she said; "do not use the spur and the whip. He is faithful, I am sure he is."

He pushed away the hair from her clear forehead, and he exclaimed, half sorrowfully:

"Oh! my little friend, why are you so young?"

"The young are true," she said, warmly. "The old betray."

He pressed her hand; he kissed Lilian; and without another word he rode away. But he soon looked back. The Manor was reddening in the evening sun; the glass windows glittered bright; the far snowy mountains shone on the sky; the mists were curling on the lake; the road sparkled with dew; and Adèle stood on the steps of the Manor looking after its master. Lilian had gone in to play in the garden, but Adèle had remained to see him as long as she could.

A month had passed away.

The afternoon was wintry and bleak. The wind moaned around the Manor with a low, sad wail; with a lament it passed through the lonely avenues of the old garden, and died away on the grey lake.

"Mademoiselle will not think of going out on this cold day," Jeannette had said. Adèle had not an-

swered ; she disliked useless argument, but no sooner was Jeannette's back turned, than she darted out and lightly ran down the broad alley. She paused and looked around her. Strangely altered seemed the aspect of the garden. The evergreen hedges had a nipped look ; the frost of the cold autumn nights had withered the flowers on their frail stems ; they hung their languid heads, all heavy with a chill, white, briny dew, which no ray of sunshine had dried that day. Oh ! for the summer dew and the summer sun to give them a second birth. Vain wish ! No more would they blossom in the fragrance and joy of their being.

“ Poor flowers, poor flowers ! ” thought Adèle, turning away with a sense of pain ; but everywhere sad images met her. The withered leaves gathered around her feet, and the keen wind that passed over her head whirled them along the path with a low, rustling sound ; the statues, in their Grecian robes, green with moss and sullied with mildew, made her shiver. Was this the happy wilderness where she had walked by Mr. Osborne's side, where the sun had felt so pleasant and so warm on the old, broken stone benches in the ancient arbours ?

“ Oh ! how long he has been gone,” she sighed ; “ how very long ! ”

She went on. On reaching the stone balustrade that overlooked the lake, she paused again, and looked down vaguely. She watched the grey clouds that floated within it ; away they went with a sullen mien, to pass above the brown mountain peaks which she saw there too. And other mountains beyond

these stretched along that cloudy sky a snowy ridge with blue and yellow tints, and broken here and there by white mists that curled around them, pale and thin, and gathered into clouds as they descended. She looked up and saw the same sad and bleak landscape. Oh! was this gloomy water the clear green lake which the romantic chapel overlooked? were those heaps of barren rock the verdant mountains that gave it their own cool hue, and shaded it on hot summer noons?

"Oh! how long—how very long he has been gone," sighed Adèle; "will he never come back?"

Fitful and unhappy she turned away. But in vain she wandered in the alleys; in vain she sought the maze, the orchard—he was still gone, and Adèle was still unquiet.

From the pain of his absence she learned what the delight of his presence had been. It was a want which nothing could supply, not even Lilian, though Lilian was very fond of Adèle now, and never so well pleased as when she could be with her. But Lilian could not be dear, like Lilian's father. His goodness, his kindness had sunk for ever in the heart of Adèle. "He is my friend," she often thought; "and I must love my friend. But I wish he would come back," she now querulously added.

"Mademoiselle Lilian," cried the angry voice of the French bonne, "come in directly."

But Mademoiselle Lilian had seen Adèle, and was running gaily towards her; and Adèle, though she received her with a kiss, said that she must go in, or her papa would be angry.

"Papa will never come back," gaily said Lilian, as she was once more surrendered into the hands of her *bonne*. "Never—never."

"Yes he will," said Adèle, a little indignantly; "he has said so."

Yet she sighed as she turned away and entered the room where Jeannette spun by the warm fire-side.

Jeannette looked at her little mistress's cold white face; but no remonstrance, half-fond, half-angry, passed her lips. She only spun more slowly, whilst Adèle sat down on a stool and looked at the bright wood fire on the brown hearth.

"How long Monsieur has been gone," said Jeannette.

"A whole month!" sighed Adèle.

"And he has never written to Mademoiselle?"

"Ah! why should he take that trouble?"

"Monsieur has been so very kind to Mademoiselle."

"Jeannette, what are you going to say?" interrupted Adèle, reddening.

"Nothing to displease Mademoiselle. But Monsieur has been so very kind; for instance, about that pretty ivory thing which he brought from Lyons, after having bought it of Pierre."

"It was Cousine's gift!" cried Adèle.

"Bought with his money," persisted Jeannette; "I know it—I am sure of it—I can prove it."

"It was he gave it to me," cried Adèle; "he—he——" she seemed unable to say more.

"Oh, that is not all," continued Jeannette; "Ma-

demoiselle is fond of reading, and Monsieur lends her books ; but does Mademoiselle suppose that these books come here for his use ? They come for Mademoiselle, and go without having been so much as opened by him."

"How can you tell?"

"I have not dusted them for days, or I have put them in a certain way, and the dust has remained on them, and they have not been moved."

"And it is for me he makes those beautiful books come from Paris?—For me ! for me !"

"Oh, that is not all," continued Jeannette ; "I might go on for ever ; but one thing more will suffice. Mademoiselle has not forgotten the night of the play, and how Monsieur found the orders in his pocket, and how surprised he was to find them there. Ah, Mademoiselle ! Mademoiselle ! the best of gentlemen can be very deceitful—very deep. I myself saw a lad on that very morning hand him those orders, and the change of the Napoleon with which he had bought them at Nantua ; and Monsieur, who did not see me, put them in his pocket very carefully."

"Then he had got them for me—on purpose for me !" cried Adèle.

"Perhaps it was for me," said Jeannette, smiling ; "perhaps, too, it was to see how I liked the play ; how I laughed, how I cried, that Monsieur, who had such urgent business in Nantua, sat in a corner of the pit until it was over."

But Adèle had not heard her. She had bowed her head on her knees, and she cried passionately.

"Mademoiselle ! Mademoiselle !" exclaimed Jeannette, alarmed, for she had never seen her little mistress weep as she wept then.

Adèle looked up.

"Oh, Jeannette !" she said, "it is the kindness—it is the kindness !" She rose, and walked about the room. "He must not be so kind," she said, "or I must not know it, or I shall do or say something foolish that will make him laugh at me, and make me run away ashamed from his sight. No, no ; there must be no more of all this, or I shall be undone."

Jeannette wished she had not spoken. She had not imagined that her little mistress would feel it so strongly. But Adèle, of her own accord, calmed down and laughed at herself. She sat again on her little stool, and clasping her arms around her knees, she looked at the fire, and smiled.

"Jeannette," she said, "you told me once that kindness could melt the heart as the sun thaws the snow ; that it made the strong weak as a little child ; and it is true, I feel it now."

"Mademoiselle must not think of that," cried Jeannette, sorely troubled ; "she must think that it is not right for even the best of gentlemen to spend money on a young lady who is nothing to him. If it were right, he would not hide it so carefully. Does Mademoiselle know how much Monsieur Osborne has spent to please and amuse her ?"

Adèle did not answer.

"Three Napoleons for the ivory case and what was in it ; no less than five and six francs at a time

for carriage of books ; and nine francs fifty centimes for the play. I do not believe that in all, Monsieur can have spent less than five or six gold Napoleons. Holy Virgin !” added Jeannette, reddening, “ that any man’s money should be spent on Mademoiselle —on Mademoiselle, who is bound to be doubly proud, because she is poor.”

“ You are right there, Jeannette ; but oh, why do you think so much of the money—so little of the kindness—when that is the thing, you know ?”

Jeannette shook her head.

“ Do you think,” pursued Adèle, looking at the fire, which shone back in her eyes, “ do you think that because I am silent, I never think of my strange lot in this world ? I am a noble, and of the noblest. The revolutionists burned our genealogical tree in the court of the Manor, but they could not burn our name from the chronicles of the province, from the history of France.”

The heart of Jeannette swelled.

“ There is not in all France a lady who can crow over Mademoiselle, so far as birth goes,” she said, proudly.

“ And what does it avail me ?” asked Adèle. “ Oh, Jeannette, God has chastised the fierce De Courcelles ; He has humbled their pride in the dust. They were a warlike race who lived but for fighting ; iron was a sword by their side, or a gauntlet in their hand. They were insolent to the strong, and pitiless to the weak ; they sent their daughters into cloisters, and they wedded all their sons, that their name might live for ever. And what has happened ? Iron is turned

into money on their land by a foreign speculator, whom they would have scorned. Their sons have died, and left no posterity; their name has fallen into distaff, as the old saying is; all the family hopes, all the family honours, have gathered on one head, and that the head of a woman—of a little girl. Through her they are now humbled into the weakness of woman and the carelessness of childhood. She is poor amongst the poor, a little dependant, friendless, and unloved. Why, there is not a peasant's son in all Courcelles that would have her for his wife, for the girl whom he marries has at least an acre of land, a cow, and half-a-dozen hens. And what has Adèle de Courcelles? Not a foot of earth, not a goat on the mountain-side, not a bird in a cage. Do not cry, Jeannette; God is good to all, and He is just. The sun lights every corner of the earth, but he does not shine on all the whole round earth at once. We might as well ask—why is the earth round? as wonder why God takes from some to give to others. From me he has taken nothing; all was gone before I was born; and that is why, perhaps, I cannot trouble my head much about a rank and a fortune I never really lost. But still, Jeannette, I do remember sometimes that I am alone, friendless, poor. I remember it when the sun is shining, when I am singing in the garden; and if I did not sing twice as fast, I really do think that I should cry. I did almost cry the other day when I saw Mr. Osborne kissing his little girl. Oh, do not wonder, Jeannette, that when you tell me of one who spends his money to please a little friendless girl, who takes

the trouble of inventing ways to instruct and amuse her without humbling her pride, who, spite of heavy business and a world of cares, gives her a place in his thoughts, and a corner in his liking—oh, do not wonder, Jeannette, that I cry from the bottom of my full heart! It is the kindness—it is the kindness!”

“Ah! Mademoiselle must not think so much of that!” sighed Jeannette; “she must not allow that great kindness.”

“And how can I prevent it?” impatiently asked Adèle.

“Mademoiselle must keep more to her room, more out of the garden, more out of the gentleman’s way; and when he does not see her, he will forget her.”

Adèle looked blank.

“I cannot—I will not,” she said, at length.

“Mademoiselle both can and will,” insisted Jeannette; and seeing her young mistress look up at her with some haughtiness, she added, in a subdued voice:

“Because it is right.”

Adèle hung her head. When she raised it, her eyes were sad, but in a calm voice she said:

“Yes, Jeannette, I will do it—because it is right.”

“It seems hard to Mademoiselle now,” resumed Jeannette; “but later Mademoiselle will not think so much of it; later she will remember all this as a dream, and feel pleased to think, that when she might have been foolish—like nine young ladies out of ten—she was wise, careful and prudent——”

“Here he is!” cried Adèle, starting to her feet and clapping her hands with joy; “come back—come back!”

She darted out of the room, leaving Jeannette confounded. “Ah!” she thought, with a groan; “I might have known what such promises were worth. Oh! it will not end well; you will see it will not.”

CHAPTER XXI.

MONSIEUR LASCOURS' PROMISE.

WHILST Jeannette was talking, Adèle was listening, not to her prudent speech, but to a loud knocking at the front door, which the moaning of the wind did not prevent her from hearing. Jeannette, however, heard nothing, and Jean was either deaf or asleep, for the knocking was repeated and not attended to. It was, it must be, Mr. Osborne returning after his long absence. Prudent resolves, sincere promises, fled by magic. He was come back, her friend, her kind friend, and they did not let him in! Then she would, her look and her tongue would be the first to bid welcome to the master of Courcelles. Full of joy at the thought, she sprang out of Jeannette's room, ran up a flight of steps and came down the passage, which a lamp lit. She reached the door as the knocking was repeated a third time; triumphantly she opened it, and remained mute. She saw, not Mr. Osborne, but her cousin and godmother, Mademoiselle de Janson, alighting from a travelling-carriage.

"Is the house bewitched?" she asked, tartly; "where is Jean?"

"I shall go and look for him at once, Cousine," said Adèle, her glee all over.

But she was spared the trouble of the search; Jean appeared and Jeannette too. Mademoiselle de Janson took no other notice of them than to bid them make haste and light a fire in the Hall, which she entered at once.

"And if Monsieur Osborne or the whole lot of them should come back!" thought Jeannette disturbed.

But such paltry considerations moved not her aristocratic mistress. She threw her cloak on Mrs. Osborne's favourite chair, and sank down on the sofa which Anna loved.

"Would not Madame prefer one of the rooms upstairs?" suggested Jeannette.

Mademoiselle de Janson raised her languid head and said shortly:

"Jeannette, you are a fool—do as I bid you. You will not see one of the Osbornes here for days—for weeks."

Her head sank back, her eyes closed. Jeannette left the room to obey, and Adèle remained standing before her godmother, mute and thoughtful.

"Cousine," she said, at length, "you saw Monsieur Osborne—how was he?—how did he look?"

"What is the child saying?" asked Mademoiselle de Janson, looking up amazed.

Adèle innocently repeated her questions, but the only answer she got was a sharp request to hold her

tongue. "She will tell me nothing," sighed Adèle to her own thoughts, "and he will not be back for days—for weeks!"

Jeannette came in to light the fire, and having succeeded in accomplishing her task, asked if Madame would take no refreshment.

"What for?" was the sharp reply, so sharply uttered, too, that Jeannette did not venture to open her lips in a hurry.

She left the room.

Adèle sat on her low stool and looked at her godmother.

"The world is going away," sighed Mademoiselle de Janson, after a while.

Move she did not, but Adèle looked at her and at the fire, listened to the wind, and leaned her cheek upon her hand. The last three months were a dream, her old life in the old Manor had come back. At eight Mademoiselle de Janson rang the bell, the two old servants appeared, and their mistress read the evening prayer. When it was over, Adèle held up her cheek for her godmother's cold evening kiss; but Mademoiselle de Janson said—

"Stay, child, I want to speak to you."

Adèle obeyed. Her godmother pointed to her stool, and bade her sit down, whilst she resumed her own chair.

"The world is going away," she said, "and the best and wisest thing we can do is to go away out of the world; accordingly, I have resolved to leave and relinquish Courcelles altogether."

The breath of Adèle seemed gone.

"Yes," continued Mademoiselle de Janson, "Courcelles we must leave. What should we do here any longer?"

Still Adèle was mute.

"When a thing has to be done," continued Mademoiselle de Janson, "let it be done quickly. We leave to-morrow morning before day."

"Where do we go to?" asked Adèle, speaking, at length.

"That is of no immediate consequence," was the short reply; "it is sufficient for you to know that we are going, and to get ready."

"Is it far away?" asked Adèle.

"Child, you have had your answer."

"Cousine, is it very far away?" the young girl inquired, with a wistful look.

"Go and get ready."

Adèle rose and stood before her godmother.

"Cousine," she said, with some solemnity, "is it out of France?"

"Go and get ready," was the inexorable reply.

Adèle shook from head to foot, and turned very pale.

"Cousine," she said, "you cannot mean it; you cannot mean to take me away from home, from country, without even a day's warning. You do not like me—I know it, and I do not complain of it—but still you cannot mean it."

"Child, do not be foolish," was Mademoiselle de Janson's answer; "I am your best friend, for I wish to remove you from a world of wickedness and cares, and I deal with you as Providence deals with

her children. I say neither why nor how—I act, and I leave it to the future to justify me.”

“This world may be wicked and full of woe,” earnestly, said Adèle; “but I am young and happy in it. And oh, Cousine! though you may act secretly like Providence, are you like Providence, all powerful? And can you turn, without fear of mistake, the means you use into one certain end?”

“Truly, the world is going away,” indignantly exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson, “when a little thing of sixteen questions the wisdom of her godmother. Go to your room at once, and let me hear no more of this.”

But instead of obeying, Adèle sank down on the floor at her godmother’s feet. She clasped her two arms around Mademoiselle de Janson’s waist, and looked up in her face with pathetic entreaty.

“Do not, Cousine,” she said, “do not; it would break my heart, I assure you it would. I should die of grief, and you would not make me die, would you?”

It was one of Mademoiselle de Janson’s freaks to act the stern lady now and then, but her light temper rarely allowed her to sustain the part in all its bearings. Instead of indignantly casting Adèle from her, and talking grandly of family authority, she looked at her almost kindly; and, parting the hair from her forehead, she said—

“You are a pretty girl, Adèle,—a very pretty girl.”

Adèle blushed, then laughed, and said demurely—

"If I am so pretty, Cousine, it would be a pity to take me out of the world."

"And I think you are happy."

"Oh, so happy, Cousine. As happy as the day is long."

Her godmother's brow grew clouded.

"As you are I was at your age," she said. "Look at me now. Oh, that some true friend had taken me in the beauty and happiness of sixteen from a world of sorrow."

Adèle was alarmed at the conclusion, and hastened to administer an antidote. With timid familiarity she unclasped her hands from her godmother's waist, and parted Mademoiselle de Janson's golden hair from her brow. She looked at her godmother as her godmother had looked at her, and archly said,—

"Ah, Cousine! what a difference—I am only pretty—you were beautiful."

"Well, well, there is something in that," replied Mademoiselle de Janson, considerably mollified; "pretty women are happy—beautiful women are born to grief."

"But I am not beautiful," urged Adèle, "I am only pretty. I shall be so happy, Cousine."

"Oh, but you are very, very pretty," said Mademoiselle de Janson; "and when women are so very, very pretty, it is almost as bad for them as being beautiful."

"No, no, I am not so very pretty," cried Adèle, disturbed; "I am too little—I am not elegant, like you. My hair is dark,—it is not like yours, bright as gold. Oh, I am not so very pretty," she added,

vexed at being unable to bring forward some other personal defect in order to support her cause.

"That will do, child," said Mademoiselle de Janson, a little coldly; "get up, and do not forget to be ready by to-morrow morning."

Adèle rose without a word; where was the use of remonstrance or entreaty? But the blood forsook her cheek, and there came a strange light to her blue eyes.

"Cousine," she said, "my mind is made up. I will not go to-morrow morning."

Mademoiselle de Janson gave a start in her chair, and opened her eyes amazed.

"And when will you go?" she asked.

"I will not go at all," replied Adèle.

She stood before her godmother, little, pale, resolute; a thing of steel, which a strong hand could snap asunder, but could not bend.

"Go to your room, child," said Mademoiselle de Janson, in her gentlest tones.

Adèle obeyed. As she closed the door, she heard her godmother exclaiming with a sigh, "The world is gone away!"

Mademoiselle de Janson long remained absorbed in thought; at length she awoke as from a dream, stretched her hand, and rang the bell. Jean appeared.

"Let everything be ready," she said, "we leave before day."

"Madame is taking Mademoiselle away," faltered Jean. His mistress stared, but did not answer. He took courage, and resumed—

"Mademoiselle is not used to travelling, and this weather—"

"Jean, do as I bid you."

Jean obeyed silently, and went to impart his troubled thoughts to Jeannette. Vainly he searched for her up and down. Jeannette was in the Hall receiving the orders of her mistress. Mademoiselle de Janson had been unusually prolix concerning the careful packing of an old ebony casket, which she desired might be put in her trunk, so as to receive no injury; and Jeannette was wondering in her mind whether her mistress meant to depart and return no more, when, without transition, the lady added—

"And when you have done that, go up to the room of Mademoiselle Adèle, and pack up her things."

The arms of Jeannette dropped by her side.

"Mademoiselle is going?" she said.

"Of course she is!" was the impatient reply.

But tears streamed down Jeannette's cheeks; imploringly she clasped her hands.

"Oh, leave her here—leave her here!" she said.

"Leave her here! you are dreaming, Jeannette. Go, and pack up her things at once."

But Jeannette did not move.

"No, no, Madame!" she entreated, "no, no, you will not do that thing. You will not rob an old woman of her child; I am sure you will not!"

"I think the world is not merely going away, I

also think it is going mad!" said Mademoiselle de Janson, sitting up indignantly in her chair. "What! I cannot take away my own cousin and god-daughter but there is such a wail raised around me, that Rachel lamenting her children never made more noise."

But with strange persistency Jeannette continued—

"I am old, but I will work for her; I am only a servant, but I will protect her against a look. You do not care about her no more than the wind that blows; and she is the apple of my eye, and the darling of my heart."

Mademoiselle de Janson looked at the old woman, and Jeannette looked at her; and in either look there was mistrust.

"Jeannette," said the lady, "for the sake of your faithful services, I forgive you this mad talk. And now do as I bid you; go, and pack up Mademoiselle de Courcelles' wardrobe."

She spoke grandly; a bitter smile passed across Jeannette's face, but she obeyed. When she reached the threshold of the door, she paused, and holding the half-open door in her hand, she turned and looked at her mistress."

"I know what is in your heart, Madame," she said, "I know it.—God forgive you!—God forgive you!"

She closed the door, and sitting down on the last step of the old staircase, she sobbed and moaned with strange passion.

"I thought it was all over—all over," she said, half-aloud. "I thought that with old greatness old

wickedness was gone. But there are only two of them left, only two, and both are women, and one must torment the other. God forgive her!—God forgive her! I cannot.”

She rose, and still weeping as she went, she proceeded to the room of Adèle. The door was ajar; a ray of light stole out on the landing. Jeannette knocked, but received no reply. She knocked again, and still all was silent.

“She has fallen asleep over one of those books,” thought Jeannette.

She pushed the door open, and entered. A light burned on the table near the bed, where Adèle lay dressed, but asleep; one arm was thrown over her head, the other hung down by the side of the bed, and her hand still held the volume she had been reading.

“The naughty child will set fire to the house one of these days,” muttered Jeannette; but suddenly remembering on what errand she had come, she sat down, and began to cry. Her sobs and her moans awoke Adèle; her eyes opened, and she sat up, gathering her fallen hair with vague surprise.

“What is it, Jeannette?” she asked, at length.

“Oh! my darling, my darling! how shall I ever part from you?” she cried, wringing her hands.

Adèle looked at her, but did not speak.

“God forgive her—God forgive her!” exclaimed Jeannette, the tears streaming down her cheek.

Nevertheless she rose, and spite her tears and her moans, she opened a chest of drawers and proceeded to empty it of its contents.

“Jeannette, what are you doing?” cried Adèle.

"Packing up Mademoiselle's things," groaned the old woman.

"You need not," said Adèle, coolly; "I have made up my mind not to go. I have told Marraine so."

"Ah! Mademoiselle, she will make you. Did not her grandmother make her mother marry old and ugly Monsieur de Janson, a gambler, too, who never did but one good thing, and that was to break his mother-in-law's heart with seventeen lawsuits?"

Adèle smiled.

"Jeannette," she said; "you and Cousine live in the past; but I, a child of the present, know those days are gone by."

"And where is Mademoiselle going?" moaned Jeannette.

"Nowhere, I tell you," indignantly replied Adèle; "you are very tiresome. Why will you not believe me?"

"Because I know the world! Mademoiselle is nothing before the law."

"The law is very impertinent."

"Mademoiselle cannot sell or buy. Mademoiselle cannot marry without her godmother's consent."

"I can say no, Jeannette," replied Adèle, and she set her young face into an expression of such inexorable and resolute will, that Jeannette was startled and for a moment frightened.

"Mademoiselle must not look so," she said; "it is wicked; it is sinful."

But even as she spoke the look had vanished; the

face of Adèle only expressed the graceful and impatient wilfulness of a child.

"Then do not teaze me," she said, shaking her pretty head; "I tell you I will stay here. I will, until Monsieur Osborne comes, and he will not let me go."

"Oh! Mademoiselle, what can he do? She hates the Osbornes. She was as beautiful and as sweet as a May morning until the father came and made love to her in the garden—the place is bewitched, I believe—then went off and married another, and do you think she would mind the son much?"

"Would she mind Monsieur Lascours?" asked Adèle, willing to pacify Jeannette; "he promised to be my friend once. And he will not break his word."

"He promised that?" cried Jeannette, with sparkling eyes; "he really did promise it?"

"He really did."

"Then Mademoiselle is saved," said Jeannette, eagerly; "Monsieur Lascours is, perhaps, the only person who has a bit of influence with Mademoiselle. She likes him and she respects him. Oh! yes, yes, it is all right now."

Adèle smiled carelessly. Of course it was all right. She had made up her mind not to go—and go she would not; but she did not take the trouble of observing as much; she merely said:

"Yes, Jeannette, it is all right; but we must get hold of Monsieur Lascours, and at once too—for Cousine speaks of going before day."

"Jean shall take Monsieur Osborne's boat, and

cross over in five minutes," said Jeannette, "and tell Monsieur Lascours that Mademoiselle wants him at once—at once."

She spoke with trembling eagerness, and went to the door, then came back.

"That will not do," she said; "Mademoiselle must write a letter."

"Oh! no," interrupted Adèle, looking alarmed; "I cannot write—I will not."

Jeannette went to the window and opened it. The night was still, the lake lay calm and quiet; a light burned in a dwelling across it. That light came from Monsieur Lascours' house. She closed the window, and turned round to Adèle.

"Would Mademoiselle be afraid to cross the lake in Monsieur Osborne's boat?" she asked gravely; "Jean is as safe a rower as there is in all the country; and if Mademoiselle tells her own tale to Monsieur Lascours, it will be best; and it will save time."

Adèle did not look pleased.

"I do not want to drop in there at night," she said, pouting; "I am not a bat."

"Ah: if I had thought that Mademoiselle would be afraid," deceitfully observed Jeannette, "I would not have spoken of such a thing."

"Afraid!" cried Adèle, starting to her feet; "afraid of crossing the quiet lake on a clear night! You know very well, Jeannette, I am not afraid. And since nothing else will please you—why, I will go. Only Monsieur Lascours will laugh at me."

"Monsieur Lascours will do no such a thing," gravely said Jeannette. "Monsieur Lascours, when

he gave that promise to Mademoiselle, knew Mademoiselle de Janson, and guessed that she would try and play strange tricks some day."

Adèle was dressing. She turned round and asked :
"What tricks?"

"Ah! Mademoiselle, the world is in a dreadful state," groaned Jeannette, "she will make you marry some rich, ugly, cross, old man, who has lost an eye or an arm."

"Or a leg," interrupted Adèle, laughing till the tears ran down her cheek. "Jeannette, I shall say 'no,' so loud, that the priest will drop his book aghast, and the bridegroom shall run away faster than he came."

"Ah! Mademoiselle, you are not going, and time passes."

"I am gone," said Adèle. She threw her mantle around her and lightly ran down the staircase

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFESSIONS.

ADÈLE found Jean in Jeannette's room, seated in Jeannette's chair, and staring vacantly at Jeannette's wheel. He had not recovered the dismay with which he had heard Mademoiselle de Janson declare her intention of going away the next morning, or, rather, of taking her god-daughter with her. Adèle had some difficulty in making him understand what she wished him to do, and some trouble in convincing him that it was right or proper to do it.

"Oh, dear!" impatiently cried the young girl, "I do believe the world is going away, as Cousine says. Is it possible, Jean, you do not understand me?"

"Mademoiselle must excuse me," agitatedly began Jean, "but my poor head—"

"What, not gone yet!" cried Jeannette, who now entered the room. "Are you dreaming, Monsieur Jean? Get up, I say; my chair is not a boat, and my wheel is not Mademoiselle Adèle. Come, quick!"

yet stay ; the night is chill ; you had better put this around you."

And opening her wooden press, she took out a woollen cloak, striped white and black, and threw it on his back.

"Mademoiselle Jeannette is too good," murmured Jean, greatly touched with this proof of tenderness and care. He had risen as if by magic on hearing her sharp, abrupt voice, which, much better than the childish tones of Adèle, made him understand what he was to do, and that it was urgent that it should be done at once ; but still somewhat confused and wild, as he would have said himself, he walked out of the room, and dropped Jeannette's cloak on the threshold.

"My new cloak !" murmured Jeannette. "Oh, what fools men are !" she added, turning up her eyes. "Well, well, one must have patience with them, poor things !—and he will catch his death of cold if I do not let him have it."—"The night is chill, and Jean is old, poor fellow ! and the cloak will outlive us both," said Philosophy—"unless he drops it in the lake," added Prudence, closing the soliloquy ; for Adèle had followed Jean out of the room, and Jeannette was walking at a distance after them in the broad alley.

But Prudence did not prevail ; for when Jeannette, rather out of breath, reached the stone steps at the bottom of which Jean was already unchaining Mr. Osborne's boat, she recklessly threw the cloak at him, and merely saying, sarcastically, "Do not drop

it in the lake, if you can help it ;” a recommendation against which Jean could not possibly protest, for the cloak alighting on his head, had fairly hood-winked him. She turned to Adèle, who was laughing merrily, and pathetically exclaimed—

“Ah, Mademoiselle, do not laugh ! do not laugh ! You have cried sorely to-night, and now you are laughing ; my heart misgives me that you will cry again.”

“Perhaps I shall, and perhaps I shall not !” saucily replied Adèle ; “but I know I shall not leave Courcelles. I will stay until Monsieur Osborne comes back, and I will ask him to let me be his little maid of all work, his little servant ; and he will pay me my wages, and I shall be as happy as the day is long.”

“The boat is ready,” said Jean.

“Good-bye to you, Jeannette !” gaily cried Adèle.

She lightly sprang down the steps, and lightly entered the boat. With one stroke of the oars, Jean sent it off on the still lake.

“I hope Monsieur Jean will not forget about the cloak,” said the voice of Jeannette.

“I will give you a velvet cloak, trimmed with fur, when I am a queen,” replied Adèle from the water, “a real velvet cloak.”

“A while ago, she was to be a servant—now a queen !” muttered Jeannette, turning away ; “the little thing is mad !—the whole world is going mad, I believe !”

The lake was still as glass ; the night had lulled into repose the moaning winds. It was a clear, serene night, without moon, but with a pale sky which a sort of light pervaded. There was a pleasant chillness in the air—pleasant, at least, to the warm, young blood of Adèle ; it made her shiver, but she liked it. “ Leave Courcelles,” she thought, breathing it in with delight, “ leave my little lake, my old garden, my mountains, and my little room—never ! never !”

Adèle had not been reared in the home to which she clung so ardently, but she had come to it when she was still a child in years ; her happiest days had been spent in its shelter ; she had grown up to girlhood within view of mountain and lake, and she loved them both with the passion of a mountaineer.

“ Leave Courcelles,” she thought again, “ never ! never ! Leave Courcelles, and not see Monsieur Osborne again ? I will not—I cannot !”

“ And how are we to get in ?” asked the voice of Jean.

Adèle awoke from her reverie ; the lake was crossed ; the boat lay still at the foot of the steps that led to Monsieur Lascours’ villa.

“ Get in ?” she gaily echoed, “ why, by getting out first, of course.”

She sprang out of the boat on the steps, ran them up, and was down an alley before Jean had recovered from his surprise.

A light burning through the trees guided Adèle

to the house. It proceeded from the boudoir of Alice, and shone, with a warm glow, behind red silk curtains, on which Adèle, drawing near, saw the profile of only one figure; and something in its light and elegant lines told her at once that it belonged to her friend. "She is alone," she thought; "so much the better; I do not much like Monsieur Lascours' keen brown eye." But it was necessary to get in, and the house was securely closed. Adèle lightly tapped on the panes of the glass door. The figure within gave a start; she tapped again; the figure rose, advanced, and withdrew the silk curtain.

"Let me in!" softly said Adèle.

Madame Lascours dropped the curtain, and uttered a cry of alarm.

"I tell you I am not a ghost!" a little indignantly exclaimed the young girl, "let me in, Alice."

Madame Lascours recovered her self-possession on hearing the well-known girlish voice that did not seem indeed to belong to another world than this, and at once she opened the door to her little friend. Adèle stepped in, and dropping the silk curtain which she had raised to enter, she looked at the wondering face of Alice, and smiled.

"I am not wet this time," she said, gaily, "and I am not come to sleep in your bed."

Madame Lascours took her hand, led her to a chair by the fire, and looking at her with troubled attention, she said—

"Adèle, what has happened?"

"Nothing," shortly answered Adèle; "but I wish I were not amiable. It is a calamity to be too good, as I am. I have come here against my own will and judgment to please Jeannette. And you receive me with a 'What has happened?' Monsieur Lascours will think me mad, of course. Is he in?"

"He is out," replied Alice, whose wonder had increased, "but he will soon be in," she added, looking at the handsome clock of the style called *roccoco*, which adorned the marble mantel-piece.

"Then I shall wait," coolly said Adèle; "I have business with Monsieur Lascours," she added, giving her friend a mischievous look. She had time to say no more; the door opened, and a quiet, middle-aged woman entered the apartment. She gave Adèle a slight, surprised bend of her calm head, then sat down by the fire, and took up a handkerchief which she was hemming. This lady Madame Lascours addressed as Madame Gérard, and Adèle remembered that Madame Gérard was one of the poor cousins of Alice, who had many; she remembered, too, that she lived in that dreary house by the lake, near which she had sat and rested on the day when she carried Mr. Osborne's letter.

Madame Gérard was a widow, a pious woman, and quietness was written in her whole aspect. Her extreme stillness silenced Adèle like a chill mist; she had a habit, too, of sighing now and then, that said without speech, "life is a folly, a dream;" and Adèle found a melancholy philosophy in Madame Gérard's very way of drawing her needle and thread.

She spoke but once; Madame Lascours had mentioned the approaching marriage of Monsieur Lascours' niece. Madame Gérard sighed and suspended her work for a moment.

"How can people marry?" she wondered; "life is so short."

"That is just why they do marry," put in Adèle; "they want to make it long by adding one life to another."

Madame Gérard gave her a calm, amazed look, and resumed her hemming. At ten this melancholy lady rose, bade Alice and Adèle good night, and retired.

Adèle shivered, and petulantly said—

"Oh, dear! your cousin has made me feel chill, Alice; but do you think Monsieur Lascours will come back to-night?"

"He certainly will, but he sometimes stays out late."

"Poor Jean is waiting in the boat. May I tell him to come into the house?"

She half rose, but the hand of Alice arrested her. She rang, a servant appeared, received a message concerning the welfare and comfort of Jean, and vanished.

"And now, child," said Madame Lascours, sitting down by Adèle, "do tell me what all this means."

"It means—it means," hesitatingly began Adèle, "that Cousine, convinced the world is going away, means to cheat the world by going away out of it first,"

and insists upon taking me with her to-morrow morning before dawn."

"Where to?" asked Madame Lascours, looking alarmed.

"Somewhere out of the world," gaily replied Adèle; "but do not look so grave, Alice. I am not going—not I—and I have told her so, too. But Jeannette having little faith in my powers of resistance, I suppose, could not be happy unless I came here to-night to ask Monsieur Lascours to interfere in my behalf. He has had the goodness to offer to be my friend, should I need him; and though I do not know how far he can help me, he will, I know, do his best."

"But what can Mademoiselle de Janson intend?" asked Alice, hesitatingly.

"Who knows?" carelessly replied the young girl; "you know she tells me nothing. I fancy she wants to go to some wild new world spot or other."

"Oh! no, it is not that," said Madame Lascours, looking sorely troubled; "it is worse, far worse for you."

"But since I am not going, Alice."

"Child, you will yield as others have yielded before you; yet if you can," she added with a low moan, "be taught by my sad example. Never marry a man whom you do not love."

Adèle gave a start; but she shook her head gaily.

"Ah! bah!" she said, "who would have a penniless girl like me?"

"You have what I had," said Alice, clasping her trembling hands, "youth and beauty, and these are woman's wealth. But, oh! be firm; do not yield; remember that marriage is the bliss of two or the torment of two. Never marry a man who loves you and whom you cannot love. You will be the punishment of his heart: he will be the sting of your conscience."

The eyes of Adèle sparkled with the generous confidence and pride of youth.

"If I had married a good man who loved me," she said, "I would love him with my whole heart, and defy Repentance or Regret."

Madame Lascours looked pained, and leaned her cheek on her hand.

"But why talk of all that?" said Adèle, calming down; "no one would have a worthless little thing like me. Cousine is not going to ask me to marry any one, for the world is going away; and as to making me marry against my will," she added, with a short, defiant laugh; "why who could do that?"

Alice smiled and sighed.

"You have a strong will," she said, "and a changeable temper. You cannot be compelled, but you may alter your mind, for you are fickle, Adèle."

Adèle reddened, and bit her lip.

"Fickle or not," she said, "I tell you that only tying me hand and foot shall make me stir out of Courcelles. Fickle or not, I tell you that I would not marry——"

She did not finish the protest. The door had opened, and Madame Gérard had entered the room with a strange perturbed meaning on her calm face.

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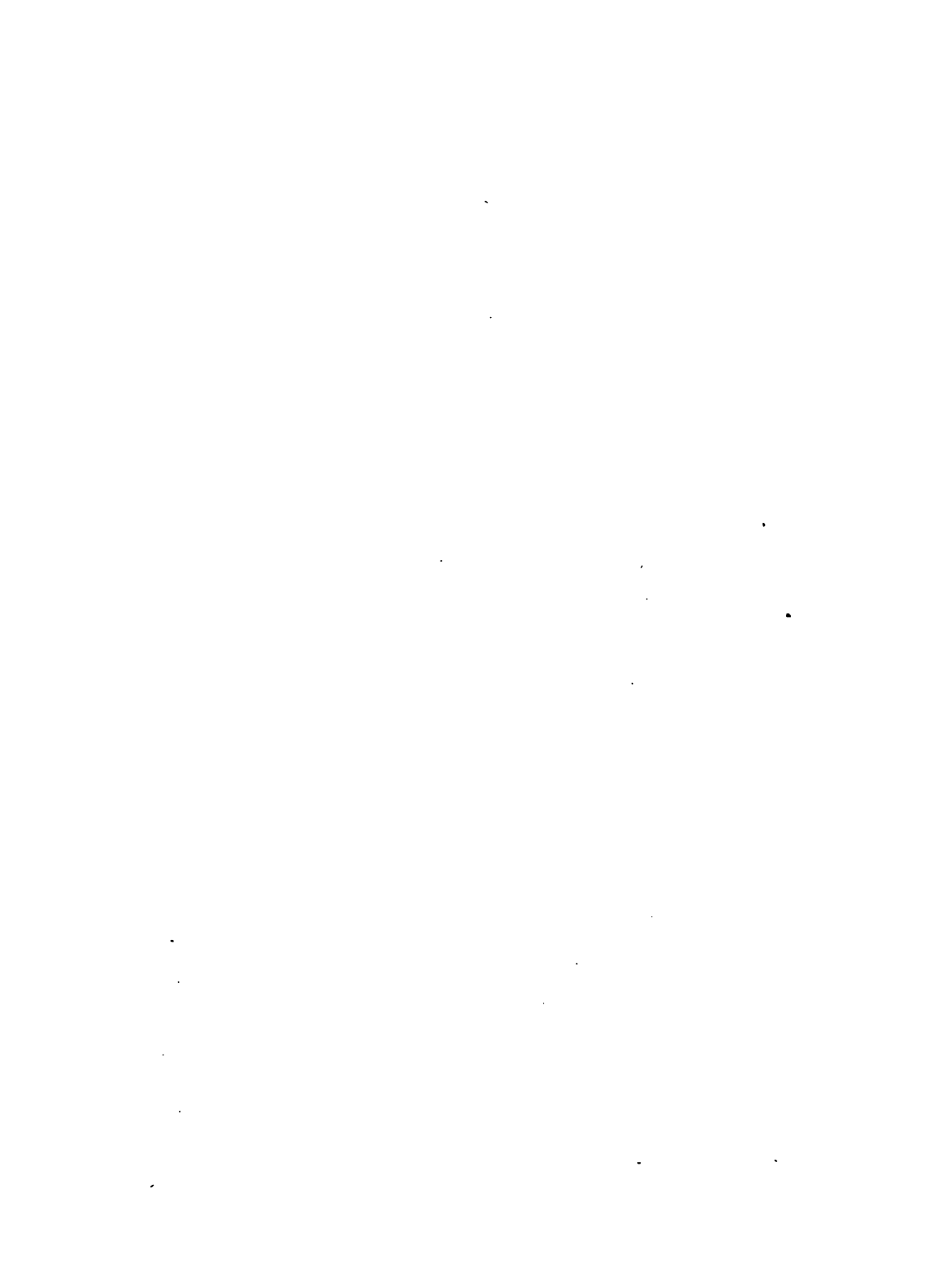
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